

WHEN THE SHAKING STOPS, THE THINKING STARTS:

A GROUNDED THEORY OF TURNOVER DECISION MAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF A SIGNIFICANT EXTRA-ORGANISATIONAL SHOCK

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ABSTRACT

Voluntary turnover has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for more than 100 years and much is understood about the drivers of turnover, and the decision-making processes involved. To date most models of voluntary turnover have assumed a rational and sequential decision process, initiated primarily by dissatisfaction with the job and the perceived availability of alternatives. Operating within a strong predictive research agenda, countless studies have sought to validate, extend and refine these traditional models through the addition of distal antecedents, mediators, moderators, and proximal antecedents of turnover. The net result of this research is a large body of empirical support for a somewhat modest relationship between job dissatisfaction, perceived alternatives, turnover intentions, job search behaviour and actual turnover. Far less scholarly attention has been directed at understanding shock-induced turnover that is not necessarily derived from dissatisfaction. Moreover, almost no consideration has been given to understanding how a significant and commonly experienced extra-organisational shock, such as natural disaster, might impact turnover decision making. Additionally, the dynamic and cumulative impacts of multiple shocks on turnover decision making have to date not been examined by turnover researchers.

In addressing these gaps this thesis presents a leaver-centric theory of employee turnover decision making that is grounded in the post-disaster context. Data for the study were collected from in-depth interviews with 31 leavers in four large organisations in Christchurch, New Zealand; an area that experienced a major natural disaster in the form of the Canterbury earthquake sequence. This context provided a unique setting in which to study turnover as the primary shock was followed by a series of smaller shocks, resulting in a period of sustained disruption to the pre-shock status quo. Grounded theory methods are used to develop a typology of leaving which describes four distinct patterns of turnover decision making that follow a significant extra-organisational shock. The proposed typology not only addresses the heterogeneous and complex nature of turnover decision making, but also provides a more nuanced explanation of the turnover process explicating how the choice of decision path followed is influenced by four contextual factors which emerged from the

data: (1) pre-shock motivational state; (2) decision difficulty; (3) experienced shock magnitude; and (4) the availability of resources. The research findings address several shortcomings in the extant literature on employee turnover, and offer practical recommendations for managers seeking to retain employees in a post-disaster setting.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Izel, who has stood by me through all of the earthquakes, life's little ups and downs, and the difficult journey that writing a thesis can be at times. You are amazing!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
PRELUDE.....	1
CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION	4
INTRODUCTION	5
WHY STUDY VOLUNTARY TURNOVER?	5
BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	8
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	13
OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN	14
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	16
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	18
INTRODUCTION	19
THE PLACE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW IN GROUNDED THEORY STUDIES	19
DEFINING VOLUNTARY TURNOVER – <i>The importance of understanding voluntariness</i>	21
TURNOVER RESEARCH IN CONTEXT - <i>The influence of conceptual tradition and dogma</i>	23
PREDICTING TURNOVER – <i>In search of the holy grail</i>	26
Attitudinal predictors – The role of satisfaction and commitment	29
Distal predictors: The influence of individual difference.....	32
Contextual predictors – The role of the work environment.....	33
Proximal predictors: Turnover intentions, perceived alternatives and job search behaviour	42
Summary – the contribution of the predictive agenda.....	50

The Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover	52
Tests and limitations of the unfolding model	55
CHAPTER SUMMARY	60
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	61
INTRODUCTION	62
RESEARCH PARADIGMS	62
Philosophical assumptions underpinning scholarly inquiry	63
Major research paradigms in social science research	67
Locating the present study - The choice of research paradigm, strategy, and methodology	73
CHAPTER SUMMARY	95
CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	96
INTRODUCTION	97
POST-CRISIS TURNOVER RESEARCH: THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT	97
SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	100
Selecting the research site and timing of the data collection.....	100
Selecting the research participants.....	102
Maintaining balance between selective and theoretical sampling	104
DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES	106
The choice of interviews as the primary data collection strategy	106
Developing the interview guide	107
Interview process and protocol	109
Interview transcription, verification and data storage	112
DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS	112
Open coding and memoing	113
Focussed coding	117
Axial coding	120

Theoretical sampling and saturation	124
Theoretical integration	125
THEORETICAL VALIDATION AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION	127
CHAPTER SUMMARY	132
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS – PART 1	133
INTRODUCTION	134
DECONSTRUCTING SHOCKS: EARTHQUAKE IMPACTS AND THE VARIED ROLE OF SHOCKS	134
Shocks as decision-initiating mechanisms	139
Shocks leading to tipping points and last straws	146
Shocks as effectuation mechanisms	160
CHAPTER SUMMARY	165
CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH FINDINGS - PART 2.....	166
INTRODUCTION	167
RATIONAL CHOICE AS A SUFFICIENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.....	167
CRITICAL REFLECTION AS A CORE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.....	170
Decision properties necessitating engaging in critical reflection	171
The nature of engaging in critical reflection	175
The outcomes of engaging critical reflection.....	179
The consequences of not engaging in critical reflection	183
CHAPTER SUMMARY	188
CHAPTER 7: A GROUNDED THEORY OF EMPLOYEE TURNOVER.....	189
INTRODUCTION	190
A TYPOLOGY OF LEAVING: <i>Eventually everyone leaves, but all leaving is not the same</i>	190
Deliberate departers	191
New beginnings.....	193
Reluctant departers	195

Tragic endings	197
DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS	199
Pre-shock motivational state	200
Decision difficulty	206
Experienced shock magnitude	210
Resources: the importance of hiatus and social support	216
IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERIAL PRACTICE	219
LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	222
CONCLUDING REMARKS	225
REFERENCES	226

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1. Organisations assisting with participant selection	103
Table 4.2 Profiles of research participants.....	105
Table 4.3 Criteria for evaluating grounded theory.....	129

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Basic model of turnover decision process.....	25
Figure 2.2. Expanded model of turnover predictors	50
Figure 2.3. Lee and Mitchell's Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover.....	55
Figure 5.1. Pre-shock motivational state.....	138
Figure 5.2. Shocks as decision-initiating mechanisms.....	145
Figure 5.3. Shocks leading to a tipping point and reassessment of the status quo.....	155
Figure 5.4. Shocks as last straws.	159
Figure 5.5. Shocks as effectuation mechanisms.....	165
Figure 7.1. Decision making process for Deliberate Departers.....	192
Figure 7.2. Decision-making process for New Beginnings	194
Figure 7.3. Decision-making process for Reluctant Departers.....	197
Figure 7.4. Decision-making process for Tragic Endings	199
Figure 7.5. Experienced shock magnitude.....	211
Figure 7.6. Varying degrees of experienced shock magnitude	212

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE	253
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS.....	255
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	257

PRELUDE

At 12.50pm on 22 February 2011 I sat peacefully working in my office preparing my first lecture for the new academic year. It was a beautiful summer's day and students had returned to campus in their droves after the long months of aftershocks and uncertainty that had followed the magnitude 7.1 earthquake which shook the city of Christchurch and wider Canterbury region on 4 September 2010. This was to be a new year and a new beginning. We had survived a major earthquake. We were resilient, life was good.

Within a minute everything changed. At 12.51pm, the 7-storey building I sat in jolted violently. My first thought was that it was merely another aftershock, one of several thousand that the region had experienced since September 2010. But, as I sat at my desk, the shaking rapidly intensified and I could hear the concrete pillars, from which this 'earthquake proof' monolith was built, start to crack. Instead of taking cover under my desk as we had been trained to do, I jumped up and stumbled towards the doorway. Realising that it was unlikely I would be able to make it much further than the doorway, I found myself spread-eagled in the 'safety' of this wooden box. Then the power went out and semi-darkness followed. Amidst the shaking and relentless groaning of the building, a colleague appeared in my doorway. She put her arms around my waist and clung tightly. She looked at me and said "I'm standing here with you, ok?" I still do not know whether she chose to stand with me in order to comfort me, or in the hope that somehow I might keep her safe or comfort her. I never did ask her; in fact the first time I saw her again was several months later.

I evacuated the building. Concrete dust covered the stairwell, which had detached itself from the main building. Selfishly, I left my bewildered colleagues and students to cope with the situation in their own way. I had a wife and a young baby boy at home to protect and to comfort. Work, the people I worked with, and the students I served held no importance to me in that moment. My wife did not answer her phone and I feared the worst. I raced home, yet in a surprisingly cognisant and safe manner. Not a single traffic light worked, and silt from below the ground was starting to bubble up in the roads – a phenomenon called liquefaction.

This was no time to drive like a cowboy. I tuned into Radio New Zealand just as the announcer interrupted his afternoon show to break the news that “Reports are coming in of a huge earthquake in Christchurch and our reporter on the ground has described a scene that sounds very bad”. My mind wandered as the enormity and reality of the situation began to set in, tears began to fill my eyes. My focus was brought back to the present as the car in front of me swerved erratically for no obvious reason and then left the road. It was the first aftershock, strong enough to take a car from the tar seal to the dirt verge. I arrived home to find my wife and child shaken and upset, but safe.

The February earthquake was centred in close proximity to the Christchurch central business district, and at a very shallow depth. Although only magnitude 6.3 on the Richter scale, the peak ground speed acceleration of 2.2g was the highest ever recorded in the world in an urban area, and four times that experienced in the 2010 Haiti earthquake. The physical devastation and loss of life was unprecedented in the region. Tragically, 184 people lost their lives that day. In a small city (population 370,000), the effect of the death toll was wide-reaching. It was New Zealand’s second-largest natural disaster in the last 100 years. A state of national emergency was declared and remained in place for several months.

In the days that followed 22 February, I watched vicariously, glued to our television set, as Urban Search and Rescue teams from around the world combed through the rubble that was once our city. Our lives were on hold, work was on hold, plans and dreams were on hold. I recall the events of 4 September 2010 and 22 February 2011 vividly; they will be forever engrained in my mind.

Most academic staff returned to work several weeks after the February earthquake, as the University tried desperately to operate a business-as-usual approach to avoid the immediate and long term mass exodus of students and staff from campus life (22,000 student enrolments and 3,000 staff). Classes were taught in tents in the University car parks (appropriately named ‘Tent City’ with a makeshift café ‘Intentcity 6.3’). Faculty members were housed in buildings and homes around the campus, while temporary accommodation was built. We remained committed to delivering a quality academic programme despite the

circumstances. The students who remained were committed to completing their degrees at the University of Canterbury. Once again we celebrated our resilience, our Cantabrian spirit and stoic nature in the face of adversity. Between September, 2010 and December 2012, the city endured 12,000 aftershocks. As the months wore on, and the aftershocks and uncertainty continued, attitudes began to change, stress levels and fatigue escalated. Both staff and students started to leave in increasing numbers. In the two years that followed the earthquakes voluntary turnover figures at the University were double their historical average. In other major employers around the city these figures were even higher.

As organisations struggled to retain employees and to understand why they were leaving, I too grappled with my own decision of whether to stay or whether to leave the University for a brighter future somewhere else. I put my Ph. D. thesis on hold for a several months. I experienced mixed emotions and went through periods of ups and downs. In the end I decided to stay; many others chose to leave.

This thesis examines the decision-making processes of employees who voluntarily left their organisation in the wake of the earthquakes. The Canterbury earthquakes are also my lived experience and one that I share in common with my research participants. My experience helped me empathize with my respondents and connect with them. This thesis tells their story. In doing so, it aims to develop a theory of how people make the decision to leave an organisation following a significant extra-organisational shock.

CHAPTER 1

An Introduction

INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents a study of voluntary turnover decision making. It is located within the unique post-crisis context following a significant natural disaster. Employee turnover, be it voluntary or otherwise, is a natural part of the employment cycle and not a necessary consequence of a crisis. However, close examination of the etymology of the word ‘crisis’ shows it derives from the Latinized Greek ‘*krienen*’, meaning ‘to decide; or a moment in time which brings about a change in the way we understand the world’. Alternatively, from Ancient Greek, the word ‘*krisis*’, implying “a separation, decision, choice, election, judgment, or dispute” (Mixner, 2012). These early definitions of what a crisis entails for the individual experiencing it provide initial insight into the choice of context for this study. By their nature crises require individuals, and organisations, to be decisive and to take decisions. The post-crisis context therefore provides a unique setting within which to study the phenomenon of voluntary turnover decision making.

Chapter 1, by way of an initial brief overview of existing turnover research, presents the background to the research problem. The research questions that guide the study are outlined, flowing into a discussion of the research design used. The significance of the study is discussed; finally, the structure of the thesis is presented.

WHY STUDY VOLUNTARY TURNOVER?

All employees eventually leave an organisation whether they plan to or not; this is one aspect that scholars and practitioners alike agree upon (Bergman, Payne, & Boswell, 2012; Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012). From a managerial and organisational perspective employee turnover is predominantly viewed as an undesirable phenomenon. Excessive employee turnover can reduce organisational effectiveness when knowledge and experience generated within the organisation migrates to other organisations as employees leave (Shaw, 2011). Indeed the most common force driving recruitment efforts in organisations is not organisational growth or prevailing economic conditions, but rather the resignation of existing employees (Iverson, 2000; Jackson, Schuler, & Werner, 2011). The administration

expense involved in replacing departing employees can be costly and time consuming. Thus voluntary turnover is of managerial and organisational significance and is studied not for its own sake but with a view towards the mitigation of the negative consequences of turnover and ultimately the retention of an organisation's most valuable asset, its human capital.

However, not all turnover is necessarily deleterious to the organisation (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010) and it is important in this regard to distinguish between functional and dysfunctional turnover (Dalton, Todor, & Krackhardt, 1982). The voluntary departure of underperforming staff would no doubt be welcomed by managers, particularly the departure of highly paid underperforming staff. Under certain conditions voluntary turnover may even be considered a desirable course of action to constrain burgeoning labour costs (Lee & Mitchell, 2005) or introduce flexibility, creativity and new talent to the organisation (Maertz & Campion, 1998). Functional voluntary turnover may also serve as a means of reducing entrenched conflict in the organisation (Staw, 1980). From the perspective of the person leaving the organisation, the turnover decision can also hold many positive outcomes such as career advancement, promotion to a better paying job, or the opportunity to end a dysfunctional working relationship with a difficult supervisor, colleague or team member. Thus voluntary turnover can hold positive outcomes for both individuals and organisations.

From an organisational perspective, however, the more commonly held view of voluntary turnover is that it is problematic, particularly when high performing employees leave (Nyberg, 2010). High levels of voluntary turnover have been shown to have a significant negative impact on organisational performance and the degree to which organisations achieve their goals (Glebbeek & Bax, 2004; Griffeth & Hom, 1995; Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, & Pierce, 2013; Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Price, 2000; Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2005). The impact on organisational performance is felt through operational disruption, production downtime, lost capacity, diminished human and social capital, and ultimately reduced profit (Dess & Shaw, 2001).

The direct dollar costs associated with employee turnover are also significant, both in terms of the costs of separation and employee replacement and in terms of sunk investments

in training and skills development. The costs associated with voluntary turnover are well documented in the turnover literature (Allen et al., 2010; Staw, 1980), with current estimates of the cost of hiring and replacement running at 90% - 200% of annual salary (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017). In New Zealand, a study of the cost of nursing turnover found that the average incident of turnover cost the employer between \$26 000 - \$31 000. These amounts were composed of recruitment, selection and hiring, temporary replacement, separation and training costs (North et al., 2005). Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Inderrieden (2005) report that turnover in health care organisations in the USA consumes between 3.4% - 5.8% of annual operating budgets. These figures increase significantly in industries where skills are notoriously hard to come by, such as the information technology industry, where turnover costs can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In addition to direct financial costs associated with turnover, the more intangible impacts such as lost organisational knowledge and social capital, increased workloads, declining morale and stress on remaining employees can also be significant. Additionally, Felps et al. (2009) proposed a theory of turnover contagion. Based primarily on the premise that people have a pervasive tendency to compare themselves to others, these authors demonstrated that a person's decision to quit and job search behaviours can influence the turnover cognitions of co-workers, thereby increasing the potential for large scale turnover at the team or work group level.

At an individual level, the turnover process also bears a burden for the person leaving the organisation. Although most commonly associated with positive outcomes, the decision to leave an organisation can be stressful for the person concerned. Negative consequences of turnover for the individual include increased stress and anxiety associated with being out of employment (if the person leaves without future employment secured) as well as adjusting to the new role and organisation. The individual is also likely to incur costs in terms of the time and energy expended on finding a new job, and the possible costs associated with relocating and adjusting to the new organisation. In a large study involving both leavers and stayers Boxall, Macky, and Rasmussen (2003) demonstrated that voluntary turnover was not

riskless and that leavers made fewer gains than stayers in terms of job security, pay and skill development.

Employee turnover is particularly problematic in disaster situations. From a disaster management perspective, turnover of staff following a disaster can significantly erode the recovery of the organisation and its ability to restore its performance to pre-disaster levels. To this end significant employee turnover following a disaster can threaten the survival of the organisation itself as it would be potentially difficult to replace the departing staff in a disaster situation.

To summarise, a recent meta-analytic review by Hancock et al. (2013) found the direct costs and human capital losses associated with voluntary turnover generally outweigh the functional benefits brought about by underperforming staff leaving and being replaced by more productive or less expensive employees. A thorough understanding of the reasons why employees leave their jobs and how they make this decision is required for organisations to be able to put in place appropriate measures to retain staff. Understanding the processes of employee turnover is therefore worthy of serious scholarly attention.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research on voluntary turnover has been directed at understanding what causes a job incumbent to leave paid employment of their own volition, along with the decision-making processes involved. It has remained the subject of considerable research attention for the past 100 years, with well over 1,500 studies addressing the topic from both a conceptual and empirical perspective (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Hom et al., 2017; Hom et al., 2012; Steel, 2002; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). The majority of these studies have taken place in large organisations in North America and other Western economies. Even within this restricted context there is little consensus regarding the factors that cause an employee to voluntarily sever employment ties, or the decision processes leavers engage in when making the decision to quit (Bergman et al., 2012; Maertz, 2012; Russell, 2013). Limited research has taken place outside of this context (Boxall

et al., 2003; Guthrie, 2001; Hines, 1973; Morrison, 2003). Additionally, there are no published studies that have specifically sought to examine turnover decision making within the unique context following a significant extra-organisational shock, such as a major crisis or natural disaster (Byron & Peterson, 2002; Davis, 2008).

Much of the current research on voluntary turnover stems from early work by March and Simon (1958); Mobley (1977); Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979); Steers and Mowday (1981) and Price and Mueller (1981). These attitudinal path models assumed that the process of decision making was rational and that the decision to quit was primarily influenced by job dissatisfaction and the perceived availability of alternatives. Subsequent research has focused on identifying distal antecedents and contextual conditions that shape individual-level attitudes related to quit intentions, and ultimately actual turnover. The net result of hundreds of studies is a large body of empirical support for a somewhat modest relationship between job dissatisfaction, perceived alternatives, turnover intentions, and turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom et al., 2012). Much of the criterion variance remains unexplained, raising questions as to the utility and relevance of this research for practitioners. Traditional turnover models seldom account for more than 15 – 20 per cent of the variance in voluntary turnover, yet these models continue to hold a dominant place in turnover research. Recently, leading scholars in the field have expressed their frustration with the state of turnover research, noting the inability of existing theories to fully explain turnover decision making (Hom & Griffeth, 2013; Russell, 2013).

Thus, while predictive models abound, significant gaps in theory remain (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). This is in part attributable to a deeply engrained positivist research tradition that has seen study after study strive to attain the “holy grail” of contemporary turnover research (Hom et al., 2012), namely an “attitudinal measure that breaks the $R^2 > .20$ barrier” (Russell, 2013, p. 168). The vast majority of turnover studies reported in the literature have been quantitative studies, employing correlational research designs focussed on prediction (Steel, 2002). These studies are generally cross-sectional and administered to existing employees. They utilise self-report measures of employee attitudes and perceptions as predictors or moderators, and turnover intentions or actual turnover data obtained from

organisational records as criterion measures. Such approaches have come to be referred to as the 'standard research design' for studying turnover (Hom et al., 2017; Steel, 2002). This approach is, however, not without its limitations. Recording turnover data from organisational records merely provides a tangible manifestation of the turnover decision, but offers little insight into the actual reasoning involved or what may have occurred in between the collection of predictor and criterion measures (Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, & Saintmacary, 1995). Such correlational research designs, while advancing science through generalisable principles, place limitations on the ability to draw conclusions regarding causality (Allen et al., 2010), and have done little to further our understanding of the actual turnover decision-making processes (Mitchell & Lee, 2013). Traditional approaches to studying turnover have thus proven restrictive for the field, both from a theoretical and methodological perspective (Morrell, Loan-Clarke, & Wilkinson, 2001). Continuation along this research path may well produce incremental improvements in prediction, as well as refinement in measurement and instrumentation, but it is unlikely to produce substantial theoretical advancement or promote real understanding of turnover decision-making processes.

Significant theoretical advancement in the field did, however, take place in the mid-to late 1990's as scholars sought to explore actual turnover decision-making processes, and specifically understand instances where the decision to leave was not derived from dissatisfaction or the availability of alternatives, and did not follow the typical job-search → job offer → turnover route (Hom et al., 2017). One major contribution to this genre of research came in the form of the unfolding model of voluntary turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). The model proposed four distinct turnover paths, several of which are initiated by a 'shock' or jarring event. Lee and Mitchell's subsequent studies provided strong empirical verification of the model's paths, and served to reshape conventional understandings of turnover (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999; Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996). Numerous studies, since then, have supported the basic tenets of the unfolding model, namely that many employees leave as the result of a shock and follow alternative paths to leaving, depending on the nature of the shock (Donnelly & Quirin, 2006; Holtom et al., 2008; Kulik, Treuren, & Bordia, 2012; Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, et al., 1999; Morrell, Loan-Clarke,

Arnold, & Wilkinson, 2008). While these studies offer strong support for the generalisability of the unfolding model, several other studies have been less confirmatory. For example, research by Niederman, Sumner, and Maertz (2007) and Holt, Rehg, Lin, and Miller (2007), and to a lesser extent Morrell et al. (2008), suggests that the turnover decision-making is further influenced by contextual and relational complexities (Morrell et al., 2001). Refinement and expansion of the unfolding model remains thus of interest to turnover scholars, with several questions still unanswered (Hom et al., 2017). These are briefly outlined below, with a full discussion in the subsequent literature review chapter.

Mitchell, Holtom, and Lee (2001) demonstrated that shocks cause voluntary departures more often than accumulated job dissatisfaction. Yet the impact that shocks have on subsequent decision processes is not fully understood. Extant models of turnover that include a shock as part of the decision-making process typically construe shocks as individually experienced, one-off, and static events (Holtom et al., 2005; Kulik et al., 2012). To date, no research has considered the dynamic nature of shocks or the cumulative impact that multiple shocks might have on turnover decision making. It is quite plausible that an employee may experience a number of shocks before ultimately feeling a compulsion to act (Kulik et al., 2012). Alternatively, an employee may leave immediately following a single shock (Hom et al., 2012, p. 833). Furthermore, shocks are typically construed as initiating the turnover decision-making process; as a result less attention has been placed on understanding how shocks might serve as the last straw on the camel's back, i.e. a final factor or a 'tipping point' in a turnover decision (Kulik et al., 2012). Additionally shocks have generally been defined as individually-experienced events, the impact of a significant extra-organisational shock that is commonly experienced by all employees has yet to be studied.

Shocks typically have a strong emotional content, i.e. they are sufficiently 'jarring' to cause the employee to reconsider their attachment to the organisation (Holtom et al., 2005). In addition, the decision to leave may be a fairly significant or momentous decision in most people's lives (Sheridan & Abelson, 1983). It involves a process of reasoning that may be coupled with mild to severe emotions. Yet, the turnover literature, with its focus on rational choice, has largely ignored the nature and impact of emotions that accompany a turnover

decision. This gap in the literature is partly attributable to the dominance of the rational choice model discussed earlier, but is also the result of several methodological shortcomings. With the exception of a few, most studies fail to ask leavers why they actually left or fail to track leavers once they have departed. Thus, both the emotions experienced during the decision-making process and the subsequent consequences of the decision are seldom captured by turnover scholars. Studies that have considered the consequences of turnover decisions have largely focussed on the organisational (Hancock et al., 2013; Shaw et al., 2005) or co-worker consequences (Felps et al., 2009) rather than those experienced by the leaver. Only recently have scholars advocated expanding the criterion space to better understand turnover destinations and the decision paths that precede these unique destinations (Hom et al., 2012).

While the unfolding model has done much to advance our understanding of turnover decision-making process, significant gaps still remain in the literature. First, the impact of moderating variables on the intention-to-quit and actual quit relationship has largely been overlooked by scholars. Due to the complexity and cost of conducting longitudinal studies and the logistical difficulties of tracking down and collecting data from actual leavers, few studies have explored what happens between quit intentions and the actual decision to quit. Hom et al. (2012:835) have, therefore, called for more in-depth analysis of the proximal withdrawal states that precede actual turnover decisions, and the contextual conditions which might serve to influence these.

Second, the rational decision-making model views turnover decision making as a judgement regarding the attractiveness of current employment compared to alternative employment options. Within this paradigm, factors influencing the turnover decision are determined by interactions between the employee and their work environment (Morrell et al., 2001). Thus most turnover theories are ones of organisational attachment and detachment, with extra-organisational influences on turnover decisions having received far less attention from turnover scholars (Cohen, 1999). The possibility that one's primary attachment may be to a person, profession or even a physical place, with only secondary attachment to the organisation has yet to be fully explored.

Third, this has led to dominant turnover models construing the decision to leave as an individual decision, with a limited number of recent studies investigating the influence that significant others such as a spouse/partner or family members might have on the decision-making process (Boyar, Valk, Maertz, & Sinha, 2011; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004).

Lastly, parsimonious and generalisable theory remains the hallmark of good science (Dennis & Kintsch, 2007), thus existing turnover models, at least within the predictive agenda, provide overly-generic and 'dehumanised' explanations of turnover decision making in which the complexity and nuanced-nature of the process is lost (Weick, 1999). Despite numerous calls for in-depth studies of actual turnover decision making to address this problem, there are still very few published qualitative studies in the turnover literature (Allen et al., 2010; Hom et al., 2012; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Morrell & Arnold, 2007).

In summary, the dominant research paradigm in the turnover literature assumes that:

- The decision to stay or quit is primarily an individual decision based on factors derived from interaction between the individual and their work environment;
- Turnover decision making is predominately rational, ignoring the emotional content of the decision to leave;
- Turnover decision making occurs in a sequential process derived from dissatisfaction or the experience of a shock that progresses in a relatively predictable order (Steel, 2002).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis represents a departure from the orthodoxy of traditional turnover research. In doing so it aims to advance understanding of actual turnover decision-making processes by seeking out and interviewing leavers. By examining turnover decisions that followed a major disaster, the thesis aims to understand the contextual influences which shape turnover decision making in a post-crisis context.

This thesis addresses the following broad research question:

- How do people who have left their jobs during a period characterised by ongoing shocks and uncertainty describe the decision-making process they engaged in?

The above question served to guide inquiry throughout the research, providing initial direction with respect to the choice of research methodology, research participants, and the operationalisation of the research methods. The research question was also important initially to establish the boundaries of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this regard the following sub-questions, determined at the outset of the study, served to limit the scope of the research:

- How do turnover decisions get made in an environment of repeated external shocks and continuing uncertainty, such as that following a major disaster?
- What are the major determinants of voluntary turnover decisions within this context?
- What impact do large external shocks, such as natural disasters, have on the turnover decisions of employees?
- What are the outcomes of voluntary turnover decisions in a post-disaster context and how might organisations influence these outcomes?

While the above questions were useful in framing the research, additional questions arose as key themes emerged from the data. These served to further focus data collection and analysis, thus reflecting the emergent nature of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007).

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis is grounded in an interpretive research paradigm. Accordingly, it adopts an inductive and qualitative approach in addressing the above research questions, which focus

on understanding turnover decision making from the leaver's point of view. This represents a significant departure from the deductive and quantitative approaches to studying turnover that are most commonly cited in the literature.

With theory generation being the ultimate goal of the thesis, a grounded theory research design was adopted. Grounded theory is well suited to situations where one seeks to understand complex phenomena and the richness of the lived experience of the research participants (Locke, 2001). In brief, grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the researcher generates theory from data to explain a core social process; in this case turnover decision making (Charmaz, 2011; Creswell, 2007). Conceptual refinement and eventual theory generation takes place through an iterative process of data collection and analysis, constant comparison, memoing and abductive reasoning (Charmaz, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The study was specifically located in the post-crisis context following the Canterbury earthquakes that took place between September 2010 and February 2011. The region experienced 57 earthquakes exceeding magnitude 5 on the Richter scale and approximately 12,000 shocks of lesser intensity during the study period. Data were collected from 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research population was drawn from individuals who had voluntarily left their organisation in the 18 month period following the initial September 2010 earthquake. Invitations to participate in the study were distributed to former employees of four organisations in the Christchurch area. The invitations requested that the leavers contact the researcher directly if they wished to participate. This initial approach to sampling deviates somewhat from grounded theory tenet that research participants should be identified through a process of theoretical sampling, whereby data collection is directed by concepts derived from the data rather than predetermined population dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Criterion-sampling in grounded theory studies is not uncommon and does not compromise the analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007a). Theoretical sampling was used to continuously refine the interview protocol in alignment with emerging conceptual themes. Furthermore, follow-up interviews were undertaken with early research participants to further explore emergent concepts.

All the 31 interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. These were returned to participants for checking and verification prior to commencing data analysis. Data analysis progressed from open coding and basic description, to conceptual ordering and finally theorising (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis comprises seven chapters, which are outlined below.

Chapter 1 presents the background to the research problem and an overview of the research questions and study design.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on employee turnover. In presenting and critiquing the extant literature, this thesis departs from the classical approach to grounded theory research espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967), but is consistent with more contemporary approaches to the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The literature review does not serve to generate testable hypotheses or research questions, but rather provides a critique of the state of turnover research at the time of commencing this thesis.

Chapters 3 and 4 elucidate the research methodology and methods used in this thesis. Chapter 3 commences with a discussion of the arguments for an alternative approach to studying turnover, and the necessity of a paradigmatic departure from the analytical mindsets that have dominated turnover research to date. Arguments are offered as to why an interpretive research design, specifically grounded theory, represents an appropriate alternative to traditional approaches to turnover research. A detailed overview of grounded methodology is provided. Chapter 3 concludes with the identification of several criteria for judging the quality of grounded theory studies. Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive discussion of how the various grounded theory method were operationalised in the present study. Procedures for sampling, data collection, and data coding and analysis are discussed and examples of coding, memoing and diagramming are provided.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings as they emerged from the data analysis. Chapter 5 focuses on the role of shocks and how the earthquake sequence influenced participants' decision making. The chapter highlights the influence of pre-shock motivational states and identifies three distinct roles that shocks play in turnover decision making. Chapter 6 examines the actual turnover processes that participants engaged in. It commences by distinguishing between two main forms of decision making; namely rational choice between known alternatives and the more complex process of engaging in critical reflection. From here, engaging in critical reflection is identified as the core category to emerge from the analysis. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to explicating the factors that necessitate engaging in critical reflection, the nature of the process itself, and finally the consequences of engaging in critical reflection.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis and is presented in three parts commencing with a discussion of the proposed typology of leaving and an explication of the unique decision paths followed by each type of leaver. Following this, the four contextual influences shaping turnover decision making are discussed in relation to existing research and the contribution they make to the literature on voluntary turnover. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research and practical implications of the study, and a brief description of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2:

Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the voluntary turnover literature. Voluntary turnover research has been the subject of several meta-analytic and conceptual reviews in the past 30 years. Much of the research in the field has focussed on individual turnover decision making. Recently, however, scholars have begun to explore other dimensions of turnover such as collective turnover (Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013) or why people choose to remain with an organisation (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). This thesis focuses, however, on individual turnover decision making, therefore the literature review deliberately excludes a specific focus on collective turnover or retention literatures.

The purpose of this critical review is to: (a) identify the gaps in the literature and justify the need for the present study in such a well-established field; (b) examine the methods used in the extant literature and justify the specific approach adopted in this thesis.

THE PLACE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW IN GROUNDED THEORY STUDIES

“There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head”

- (Dey, 1999, p. 251)

Grounded theory is a research method that aids in generating theory or new conceptual propositions from data. It is an inductive method that privileges empirical data over preconceived theoretical frameworks and hypotheses. In their original publication of the method Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued against an early review of the literature in the substantive field of study, their main concern being that it would likely ‘contaminate’ data collection and analysis and serve to force theory rather than allow it to emerge from the data. Barney Glaser and others (e.g., Christiansen, 2008; Holton, 2007, 2009) continue to advocate for this approach. In what has become a very divisive issue in grounded theory research, several scholars have deviated from Glaser and Strauss’ original position and recommend that a review of the literature be undertaken early in the research process (Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lempert, 2007).

Suddaby (2006, p. 634) argues strongly for prior review of the literature, particularly when studying a topic in what he refers to as ‘well-tilled soil’ or well established areas of empirical inquiry, such as voluntary turnover. He addresses concerns of ‘contamination’ by emphasising the importance of reflexivity and a continual awareness by the researcher of the potential impact that pre-existing knowledge may have on data interpretation and theory development. Dunne (2011) summarises the most compelling arguments for an early literature review in grounded theory studies, stating that it:

- Provides a rationale for the study and a justification for the selected approach to the research;
- Ensures that the research has not already been undertaken elsewhere.
- Helps contextualise the study by examining how a given phenomenon has been studied to date;
- Can stimulate and enhance theoretical sensitivity. That is the ability to pick up on subtle nuances and cues in data that point to meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 19);
- Can promote clarity of thinking about concepts and theory development.

In addition to the above arguments, Stern (2007) highlights several pragmatic realities faced by the researcher, particularly those undertaking doctoral research. She notes that an early review of the literature is often a requirement of the doctoral programme and a necessary step in obtaining Human Ethics Committee (HEC) or Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the research. Furthermore, an initial review of the literature is often undertaken prior to the eventual research design being decided upon, as was the case in this thesis. Also in the case of doctoral study, coursework in post-graduate or even undergraduate studies may expose the researcher to both conceptual and empirical work in the literature. Thus, to assume that the researcher, experienced or novice, will enter the field *tabula rasa*, as a blank slate, is both naïve, impractical and unrealistic (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Siggelkow, 2007; Suddaby, 2006).

When and how to engage with the literature will no doubt remain a contentious issue for some time to come. Ultimately though, the decision on when to engage with the literature is one that needs to be made by the researcher. In doing so one needs to establish a comfortable position between the pragmatic concerns of practitioners “doing grounded theory” with the purist ideologies of methodologists (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) on “how grounded theory should be done”. To this end, I entered the research process with considerable prior exposure to parts of the voluntary turnover literature. Indeed the choice of grounded theory as a research method came about as a consequence of an initial reading of the turnover literature and the realisation that the prevailing dominant quantitative research paradigm had done little to advance theory in the field. Therefore, the literature review that follows was undertaken not with a view to generating specific testable hypotheses, but rather to identify gaps in existing knowledge and provide a justification for both the research purpose and the design of the study. The literature review which follows adopts the starting point offered by Hutchinson (1993); that of “What do we know about this phenomenon?”

DEFINING VOLUNTARY TURNOVER – *The importance of understanding voluntariness*

Turnover refers to the movement of employees across the membership boundaries of an organisation (Price, 1977). It consists of voluntary (employee-initiated) and involuntary (employer-initiated) turnover (Hom et al., 2012; Maertz & Campion, 1998). Voluntary turnover occurs when “employees who receive monetary compensation for participation in an organisation willingly terminate their relationship with the organisation” (Hom & Griffeth, 1995, p. 5), most commonly through resignation or retirement. Maertz and Campion (1998) describe voluntary turnover as instances of turnover wherein employees had the opportunity to continue employment with the organisation, and where continued employment was not impeded by company management or physical disability, but they still chose to leave of their own volition. Common to both of these definitions is the exercise of choice by the individual making the decision to leave (Morrell et al., 2001).

This is in contrast to involuntary turnover which results from retrenchment, downsizing, dismissal or death (Boswell, Run Ren, & Hinrichs, 2008). Price and Mueller (1981) also exclude transfers and promotions within an organisation as forms of voluntary turnover. Further distinction is often made between avoidable and unavoidable turnover with organisationally unavoidable turnover including leaving for reasons such as pregnancy, relocation of a spouse or childcare responsibilities (Abelson, 1987; Boswell et al., 2008). Organisationally avoidable turnover is generally described as turnover that could have been prevented through action on the part of the employer, for example the employer offering the employee an inducement to stay.

Volitional control and turnover avoidability are therefore key dimensions in defining whether turnover is voluntary or not. Despite this, most research reported in the literature fails to take into account the variation that these dimensions might bring to the turnover decision-making process. Instead turnover scholars have tended to rely on, often inaccurate, organisational classifications of whether a decision to leave is voluntary or not (Hom et al., 2012). Research has also generally tended to focus on employees leaving full-time paid employment with an organisation, and has yet to explore turnover of people who form voluntary associations with organisations or who are employed on a less permanent basis (Price, 2000). An additional dimension worthy of mention is that of turnover functionality and the consequences that turnover at an individual, or collective level, might hold for an organisation. These aspects have, however, been addressed in Chapter 1 and are thus not included here.

Drawing on the above discussion, voluntary turnover in this thesis is defined as follows:

Instances of individual employee turnover wherein the decision to quit is of the employee's own volition (although the degree of perceived voluntariness and control may vary), and there are no organisationally imposed impediments to continued employment with the organisation at the time of termination.

TURNOVER RESEARCH IN CONTEXT - *The influence of conceptual tradition and dogma*

Voluntary turnover scholarship has to date focussed primarily on two main goals; prediction and explanation. The first aim involves the identification of factors that cause people to leave their jobs. The assumption being that in order to control voluntary turnover one must understand its causes. Much scholarship has therefore been devoted to identifying predictors and correlates of turnover intentions or actual turnover behaviour (Maertz & Campion, 1998). This first aim is often referred to as the 'predictive agenda'. It deals with turnover model content and is premised on the assumption that turnover decisions hold an "evolutionary dimension", i.e. they are the end product of a process (Morrell et al., 2001, p. 224). Thus researchers have endeavoured to identify determinants of turnover, with the aim of better predicting, and controlling turnover. This research agenda has been useful in identifying what Steel and Lounsbury (2009, p. 274) refer to as "core mechanisms" in turnover models. The theoretical contributions and shortcomings of this first research agenda are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The second aim of turnover scholarship involves understanding and explaining the turnover decision-making process. Researchers within this agenda endeavour to provide an account of how individuals arrive at their final decision to leave an organisation (Maertz & Campion, 2004). Thus theories attempt to model the decision sequence involved in the turnover process. No fewer than 24 such models are to be found in the turnover literature - evidence of the fact that voluntary turnover has in the past, and remains today, of interest to scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines such human resource management, organisational behaviour, industrial psychology, sociology, strategy, and economics (Boswell et al., 2008; Hom et al., 2017).

Two specific disciplines have had profound influence on turnover theory, namely labour economics and psychology (Morrell et al., 2001; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). The field of labour economics views turnover decision making as a rational process involving objective consideration of expected utility, availability of job opportunities or perceived alternatives, and the associated costs of leaving. Within this conceptual tradition turnover decisions are

construed as an economic choice influenced primarily by prevailing labour market conditions. The focus of much of the research within this conceptual tradition is therefore on the external determinants of turnover decisions.

Turnover theories with conceptual roots in the field of organisational psychology tend to view turnover more as an individual choice. Thus research within this discipline has focused on the cognitive evaluations made by employees, and the identification of the distal and proximal antecedents of turnover decisions. Within this conceptual paradigm, administrative theory (March & Simon, 1958) and attitude theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) have had a dominant influence in shaping much of present day turnover theory. March and Simon's (1958) model drew on administrative theory to portray the turnover decision process as a rational process that progresses in a relatively systematic fashion. Building on March and Simon's work, Mobley (1977) applied Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action in developing his 'intermediate linkages model' of turnover. These two turnover models laid the foundation for much of the turnover research that followed (Hom et al., 2017). As a consequence turnover theory originating from within the field of psychology has tended to place considerable emphasis on attitudinal determinants of turnover decisions, particularly job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intentions. While this in itself is not problematic, the dominance of these conceptual traditions has meant that alternative explanations of turnover have generally remained under-researched. Departures from attitudinal models, while not the norm, are not unheard of. For example, Lee and Mitchell (1994) drew on image theory (Beach, 1990) to develop their 'unfolding model of voluntary turnover'. Another example is Steel (2002) who used cybernetic theory in proposing his 'evolutionary job search model'. As a result of these rich and diverse conceptual approaches, numerous theories exist to explain the turnover process. Consequently theoretical divergence, rather than consensus would best describe the current state turnover research. Steel and Lounsbury (2009) conclude that no universally-accepted statement of the turnover process exists as of yet. They also point out that not all turnover scholars have as their goal the development of a universal model of turnover. Rather they suggest that scholars generally follow one of three "conceptual policies" (p. 272) when studying the turnover process. They distinguish between universal, modal, and sub-populational turnover models. *Sub-*

populational turnover models are developed on the assumption that the turnover decision process may be different for different groups of people or within different contexts. While likely to be of most relevance to managers due to their context-specific nature, sub-populational models are the least common in the academic literature, where generalisability of theory is seen as important. *Modal turnover* models aim to describe the most typical turnover process by identifying commonalities across individuals and contexts. *Universal turnover* models describe a process that can explain the turnover decision making of any individual in any context. The assumption of these models or grand theories is that the context or individual circumstances faced should not alter the basic decision-making process. Turnover decisions have, however, been shown to be highly complex (Morrell & Arnold, 2007). Thus while universal accounts of the turnover process have had some success in identifying the ‘core mechanisms’ of turnover decisions, these explanations fail to capture the complex and nuanced nature of actual turnover decision making. That said, a brief examination of the basic turnover process provides a useful point of departure for the current literature review. The ubiquity of certain constructs in the turnover literature attests to the fact that there is at least some consensus regarding the general sequence of turnover decisions (Hom et al., 1992; Hom et al., 2012; Maertz & Campion, 2004; Russell, 2013; Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). Steel and Lounsbury (2009, p. 274) refer to these constructs as “core mechanisms” that have come to form the backbone of turnover theory. They include job attitudes, behavioural intentions, and job search mechanisms. These constructs are generally modelled as depicted in Figure 2.1.

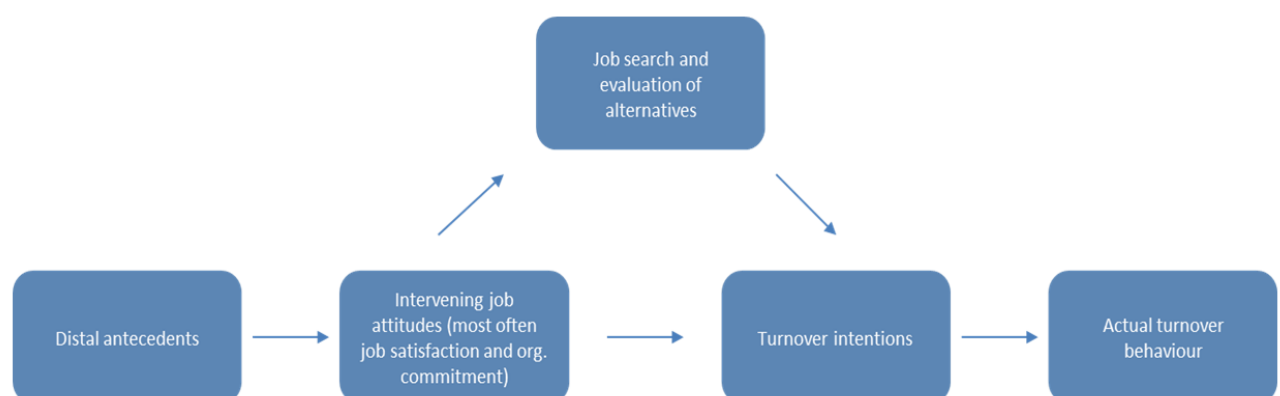


Figure 2.1. Basic model of turnover decision process

The literature review that follows seeks to examine the above model in greater detail and is presented in two sections. First, the major determinants of turnover decisions are explored. In this section the distal and attitudinal antecedents of turnover decisions are more closely examined, as well as the other core mechanisms mentioned above. The second section focuses on the turnover decision process and examines expanded and alternative models to the universal one presented above.

PREDICTING TURNOVER – *In search of the holy grail.*

In the most recent and comprehensive critique of the turnover literature Hom et al. (2012, p. 832) remark that: “finding new predictors besides quit intentions (and attitudes and alternatives) represents the implicit Holy Grail among present-day investigators”. Indeed this ‘holy grail’ pursuit has endured for well over 50 years and continues to pique the interest of turnover scholars, particularly those in the management and psychology disciplines. The start of this search can be traced back to March and Simon’s (1958) seminal theory of organisational equilibrium and what they termed ‘the decision to participate’. They proposed that the decision to participate, i.e. to remain with the organisation, is influenced by two main considerations – perceived desirability of movement, and perceived ease of movement. Desirability of movement was deemed to be a function of the individual’s satisfaction with the job. It was argued that the greater the satisfaction with the job, the less desirable it becomes to leave the organisation. Ease of movement related to the availability and visibility of jobs external to the organisation. It was proposed that the greater the number of perceived alternatives outside the organisation, the greater the perceived ease of movement.

March and Simon’s work had a significant impact on subsequent theorising and model development. Early research that followed their work sought to expand their framework horizontally by adding additional distal turnover antecedents including demographic differences and job attitudes such as employees’ met expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973). These models sought to explicate *why* employees chose to voluntarily leave the organisation and how individual differences might influence this. Maertz and Campion (1998) note that the primary focus of much of this research was on bivariate predictors and correlates of

turnover, in particular the role of job satisfaction. The basic assumption pervading these early studies was that job satisfaction levels had a direct impact on turnover. Empirical tests of the March and Simon model generally reported consistent, but weak ($r < -.20$), negative correlations between satisfaction and turnover (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand & Meglino, 1979). Thus, desirability of movement (construed as job satisfaction) and ease of movement (construed as perceived alternatives) have become core constructs in most turnover models (Holtom et al., 2008). This is, however, not the only influence that the March and Simon model has had on turnover research. With conceptual roots in administrative theory, March and Simon's account portrays turnover decision making as a largely rational process (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). For example, the decision to leave, even when dissatisfied, still involves an evaluation of the expected utility of alternatives (Allen, 2004a). This original portrayal of turnover decision making as highly rational further shaped subsequent model development. In this regard, Lee and Mitchell (1994) and others have suggested that the March and Simon model has perhaps had a disproportional influence on the development of turnover theory, at the expense of the exploration of alternatives.

Two additional turnover models have also had a profound influence on the field, namely Mobley et al.'s (1979) intermediate linkages model and the "Price-Mueller" (1981) casual model. Mobley and colleagues sought to identify the intervening variables between job attitudes and actual turnover behaviour (Mobley, 1977; Mobley et al., 1979). Building on the earlier work of Porter and Steers (1973), Mobley proposed that thoughts of quitting, perceived alternatives, and intention to quit all mediate the attitude-turnover relationship. Mobley proposed that quit intentions immediately precede actual turnover. The processual aspects of Mobley's model are discussed in more detail in later sections of this review.

About the same time as Mobley's research, Price and his colleagues at the University of Iowa sought to develop a causal model of the voluntary turnover. Their original focus was on identifying turnover determinants, primarily the antecedents to job satisfaction (Price, 1977). The Price-Mueller model was later expanded to also include behavioural intentions. Intent to stay, rather than intent to leave, was included in their model (Price & Mueller, 1981;

1986). Intent to stay was viewed by Price and Mueller as a dimension of a broader 'commitment construct'.

The final core constructs to emerge from early turnover research are 'perceived alternatives' and 'job search behaviour'. These too can be traced back to March and Simon's (1958) 'ease of movement' concept. Perceived alternatives refer to an employee's subjective judgement of how easy it will be to find alternative employment, i.e. perceptions of the labour market (Boswell et al., 2008). Mobley et al. (1979) suggested that following job dissatisfaction, the employee assesses the likelihood of finding alternative employment and makes a subjective judgement regarding the expected utility of searching for a job and the associated costs of quitting. If available alternatives are found to be low or the cost of quitting very high, the employee may re-evaluate their job and reduce thoughts of quitting. Alternatively if the cost of quitting is low and alternatives plentiful the employee will undertake a comprehensive job search and comparison of alternatives.

Research that followed the Mobley et al. and Price-Mueller accounts has provided empirical support for the importance of job attitudes, perceived alternatives, job search behaviour and turnover intentions in predicting turnover decisions (Allen, 2004a, 2004b; Griffeth et al., 2000; Hom et al., 1992; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993). A more detailed discussion of the predictive validity of these core constructs follows below. Prior to doing so it is important to briefly examine what Steel (2002, p. 347) refers to as the "standard research practice" of voluntary turnover scholars. Employing a static cohort method, researchers generally administer surveys to a group of employees at a given point in time. The surveys include a range of predictor variables such as job satisfaction, turnover intentions and perceived alternatives. At a specified point in the future, usually between 6 – 12 months following survey administration, criterion data pertaining to the cohort are collected from the organisation. Actual turnover represents the criterion variable; however, in many reported studies turnover intention is used as a proxy. Based on this data, study participants are classified either as leavers or stayers. Correlational techniques are then employed establish the criterion validity of the various predictors included in the study. Thus in discussing the

various predictors in the sections that follow, reference is made to correlations in terms of the predictor-turnover relationship.

Attitudinal predictors – The role of satisfaction and commitment

Job satisfaction - defined as a positive (or negative) appraisal of one's job that is caused by affective experiences at work (Locke, 1976; Weiss, 2002), is the most commonly included attitudinal predictor in turnover models (Holtom et al., 2008; Liu, Mitchell, Lee, Holtom, & Hinkin, 2012). Job satisfaction is theorised to relate negatively to turnover intentions and actual turnover behaviour, and has been demonstrated to have both direct and indirect effects on turnover (Hom et al., 1992). In this regard job satisfaction can be viewed as a 'global mediator' for the effects of more distal turnover determinants (Liu et al., 2012, p. 3). Despite its ubiquity in turnover studies, job satisfaction demonstrates only modest ($r = -.19$), yet consistent, predictive validity (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth et al., 2000). This relationship holds true for both global and multi-facet measures of job satisfaction. Such modest predictive validity suggests that job satisfaction accounts for only a small portion of the overall variance in turnover. Part of the explanation for this lies in the fact that job satisfaction itself is in fact a more distal antecedent of actual turnover (Boswell et al., 2008). That is, more proximal antecedents, such as turnover intentions and perceived alternatives, mediate the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover as suggested by Mobley et al. (1979) and others. Moreover the satisfaction-turnover relationship is often moderated by extra-organisational factors such as unemployment levels, industry type or career orientation (Carsten & Spector, 1987; Hom et al., 1992; Tschopp, Grote, & Gerber, 2013).

An alternative explanation for the low predictive validity of job satisfaction may lie in the fact that many leavers are not inherently dissatisfied with their jobs, rather their leaving may be caused by other intra- or extra-organisational factors (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), although it appears that researchers are loath to move too far beyond job satisfaction as a key determinant of turnover decisions. Thus the satisfaction-turnover relationship remains of significant interest to turnover scholars (Hom et al., 2017). For example recent studies have sought to examine the dynamic nature of the satisfaction-turnover relationship and how

changes in job satisfaction levels over time influence quit intentions and actual quit behaviour (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011; Liu et al., 2012). In this regard, Chen et al. (2011) demonstrated that changes in job satisfaction trajectories over time predicted turnover intentions above absolute (average) measures of satisfaction. Their findings were supported by the work of Liu et al. (2012), and suggest that a change in job satisfaction serves to shape employees' expectations for future work experiences, which in turn influences their intentions to stay or leave. Both of these studies move beyond the 'static cohort' research method referred to earlier and offer some promise in advancing understanding of how, when and why job satisfaction influences turnover. Furthermore, Liu et al. (2012) suggest that attitudinal trajectory change may not be unique to job satisfaction. As such they recommend that trajectory, as well as absolute measures of attitudes, should be included in future turnover research.

Organisational commitment – represents another key attitudinal variable in turnover models. Moving beyond affective responses to the job itself, organisational commitment is defined as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Recently organisational commitment has been conceptualised as an internal force that binds the individual to the organisation or a course of action of relevance to the organisation (Meyer, 2009). Meyer proposes that these 'forces' are experienced as conscious mindsets of desire (affective commitment), obligation (normative commitment) and cost (continuance commitment). With multiple binding forces central to the construct of organisational commitment, its inclusion as a key variable in turnover models is logical and intuitively appealing.

It has been theorised that organisational commitment mediates the job satisfaction-turnover relationship, such that lower job satisfaction leads to lower organisational commitment, which in turn leads to thoughts of quitting and eventual turnover behaviour. There is strong statistical evidence to support the proposition that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are related (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). This relationship appears strongest between affective commitment and overall job satisfaction ($r = .65$). Meta-analytic findings demonstrate that global organisational

commitment is negatively correlated with actual turnover behaviour (Griffeth et al., 2000), although, as in the case with job satisfaction, predictive validity is modest ($r = -.22$). All three forms of commitment have also been shown to correlate negatively with turnover intentions and actual turnover, with affective commitment showing the strongest relationship ($r = -.17$).

Meyer et al. (2002) offer some explanation for the modest predictive validity of organisational commitment arguing that it is a consequence of the multidimensional nature of the construct. For example, a high level of continuance commitment may compensate for or offset a lower level of affective or normative commitment. They argue that a high level of one form of commitment should be sufficient to generate an intention to stay, whereas the opposite is not necessarily true in that a low level of one form of commitment is unlikely to generate leaving intentions unless the other two forms of commitment are low as well (Meyer et al., 2002). Thus while each of the three forms of commitment is a unique predictor of turnover behaviour, on their own they do not necessarily represent a causal force driving turnover. This idea is perhaps best captured by Maertz and Griffeth's (2004) eight motivational forces model. In describing one such force, 'affective forces', they argue that people are generally hedonistic in their approach to work, seeking out pleasurable situations and avoiding ones that result in negative emotions or psychological discomfort. Thus an individual who derives pleasure from organisational membership will want this state to continue and therefore will aim to continue membership of the organisation. Conversely, an individual who experiences psychological discomfort in the organisation will seek to address this discomfort. One such way of doing this is by leaving the organisation. Maertz and Griffeth's 'affective forces' are not that dissimilar to affective commitment discussed above, however, they propose that affective forces represent only one motivational force driving turnover behaviour. They argue that affective forces may potentially relate to any of the other seven identified forces in three possible ways. First, they suggest that motivational forces may change concurrently as a consequence of events or cognitions. Secondly, they may interact in such a way that they either mitigate or exacerbate the effects of other forces, as in Meyer et al.'s (2002) explanation above. Finally, motivational forces may directly oppose one another.

Despite the modest predictive validity of job satisfaction and organisational commitment, these two variables have become well established in turnover models (Allen et al., 2010). As a consequence much scholarly attention has been devoted to identifying the antecedents of these two variables as well as other more distal turnover antecedents. Studies examining these 'drivers' of turnover over can be divided into two broad categories, namely individual difference predictors and work environment or contextual predictors. These are discussed more fully below.

Distal predictors: The influence of individual difference

Turnover decisions are typically construed as individual decisions, particularly within the psychological perspective on turnover. Researchers have therefore sought to establish whether personal determinants such as age, gender, tenure and race predict turnover, either directly or as dispositional correlates of the key attitudes discussed earlier. Although numerous personal characteristics have been shown to predict turnover, meta-analytic findings generally suggest that the predictive strength of these variables is modest, at best, and sometimes very low (Allen et al., 2010; Griffeth et al., 2000). Specifically biographic data does not tend to predict turnover in a meaningful way. Results from the Griffeth et al. (2000) meta-analysis show that cognitive ability ($r = .01$), education ($r = .05$), marital status ($r = -.05$), race ($r = -.01$), and gender ($r = -.03$) are all relatively poor predictors of turnover behaviour. Exceptions to this are company tenure ($r = -.20$) and number of dependent children ($r = -.14$), suggesting that people with a longer average tenure are less likely to leave, as are those with a greater kinship responsibility.

Personality has also been suggested as a predictor of turnover, with arguments that personality impacts behaviour through its influence on an individual's affective responses, goals, values, and interpretations and response to events and situations (Zimmerman, 2008). Research on the relationship between personality and turnover has tended to focus on the five-factor model (FFM) of personality, as well as trait-affect models. Empirical evidence in this regard has been somewhat inconsistent (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Salgado, 2002; Zimmerman, 2008). The most recent meta-analytic review by Zimmerman does, however,

offer some interesting insight into the role of personality, specifically in terms of the FFM. Except for extraversion, all of the personality dimensions were found to have moderate effects on either turnover intentions or actual turnover behaviour. Emotional stability was found to have the strongest effect on quit intentions ($r = -.29$). Although demonstrating a direct effect on actual turnover, the largest correlation was with job satisfaction and intent to quit. This relationship did not hold true for actual quit behaviour. Rather conscientiousness ($r = -.20$) and agreeableness ($r = -.25$) had the strongest relationship with actual quit behaviour. These findings suggest that while negative affectivity has a strong influence on job satisfaction and quit intentions, actual quit decisions are more strongly affected by traits related to impulsivity control, i.e. more conscientious individuals are less likely to quit spontaneously. This provides support for the view that not all turnover decisions are a function of cumulative dissatisfaction or declining organisational commitment. It also aids in understanding the consistent, yet weak, relationship between job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover.

Contextual predictors – The role of the work environment

In moving beyond individual difference and well-established attitudinal predictors such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, researchers have in the last two decades incorporated a multitude of new predictors into turnover models. Many such predictors relate to the work environment or person-context interface and include variables such as stress, communication, exhaustion, justice perceptions and perceived organisational support (POS) to name but a few (Holtom et al., 2008). The section that follows discusses the most prominent work environment predictors of turnover to be found in the literature.

One aspect of the work environment that has received considerable attention from turnover scholars is pay and pay satisfaction. Early empirical research into the pay-turnover relationship examined the impact that pay, in absolute monetary terms, has on turnover behaviour. These studies consistently demonstrated a negative relationship between pay and turnover, i.e. higher pay is associated with lower turnover (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth et al., 2000). Although this relationship was consistent across numerous studies, effect sizes for

the relationship were generally modest ($r = -.09$). One might have expected a stronger relationship between pay and turnover given that there is a strong relationship between pay level and pay satisfaction, and that pay satisfaction is a core facet of job satisfaction (Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw, & Rich, 2010). That said, however, pay satisfaction is only one facet of overall job satisfaction. Other facets of job satisfaction may well compensate for low levels of pay satisfaction, as might other more intrinsic rewards derived from doing meaningful work. Judge et al. (2010, p. 162) provide a salient example to illustrate this fact, comparing findings from research drawing on a sample of lawyers and childcare workers. The sample of lawyers earning an average of \$148,000 per year (in 2009 dollars) was less job satisfied (68% of scale maximum) than a sample of child care workers earning \$23,500 per year (79% of scale maximum).

More recent research on the pay-turnover relationship has therefore moved beyond traditional measures of absolute pay or pay satisfaction and has focussed on the influence of perceptions of equity, fairness and justice. In relation to the pay satisfaction-turnover relationship two forms of justice are of particular importance, namely distributive and procedural justice. Distributive justice is concerned not with the absolute level of an outcome (in this case pay), but rather whether the outcome is perceived as being fair and equitable. Procedural justice on the other hand refers to whether the process used for outcome distribution is deemed to be fair or not (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Research by Tekleab, Bartol, and Liu (2005) demonstrated that the relationship between absolute pay and pay level satisfaction, as well as pay raise satisfaction, is mediated by justice perceptions. Interestingly they found distributive justice to be more strongly associated with pay level satisfaction, whereas procedural justice was more strongly associated with pay raise satisfaction. Furthermore they found that only pay raise satisfaction was predictive of turnover intention and actual turnover behaviour.

Justice perceptions are not only of importance with reference to the pay-turnover relationship. Together with interactional justice, distributive and procedural justice constitute three sub-dimensions of a broader organisational justice construct (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). All three dimensions have been demonstrated to be indirectly related to

turnover (Colquitt et al., 2001). Justice perceptions have most commonly been theorised to impact turnover through diminished satisfaction and organisational commitment (Aquino, Griffeth, Allen, & Hom, 1997; Dailey & Kirk, 1992; Poon, 2012). That is, perceived unfairness results in feelings of deprivation and discontent, the outcomes of which include increased absenteeism, counterproductive work behaviour and ultimately turnover. More recent studies have sought to examine the underlying mechanisms through which justice perceptions influence turnover behaviour, and have considered other possible mediators, in particular stress, emotional exhaustion and burnout (Campbell, Perry, Maertz, Allen, & Griffeth, 2013; Cole, Bernerth, Walter, & Holt, 2010; Tayfur, Bayhan Karapinar, & Metin Camgoz, 2013). In this regard Tayfur et al. (2013) argue that employees who perceive organisational injustice are more likely to experience psychological distress (e.g. stress and emotional exhaustion) and burnout.

Outside of the justice-turnover relationship, stress, exhaustion, well-being, and uncertainty have all been shown to be predictive of turnover (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; Iverson, 2000; Tayfur et al., 2013). Most studies demonstrate that individuals experiencing high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion express a greater desire to leave the organisation (De Croon, Sluiter, Blonk, Broersen, & Frings-Dresen, 2004). Building on these more rudimentary explanations, Podsakoff, LePine, and LePine (2007) propose a more comprehensive two-dimensional work stressor framework to explain the stress-turnover relationship, differentiating between hindrance and challenge stressors. Hindrance stressors (for example role conflict, role ambiguity and organisational politics) are appraised by an employee as potentially constraining of personal development and work-accomplishment, whereas challenge stressors (for example time urgency and high levels of workload) are appraised as promoting personal growth and achievement (Podsakoff et al., 2007, p. 438). Podsakoff and colleagues showed that both hindrance and challenge stressors had indirect effects, through job satisfaction and organisational commitment, on turnover intentions and actual turnover behaviour. More importantly, however, they demonstrated that the two stressor types have opposing effects on turnover. Hindrance stressors have a negative relationship with job satisfaction and organisational commitment and a positive relationship with turnover intentions and actual turnover, whereas the opposite was found

to be true for challenge stressors. These findings demonstrated that stress does not always hold deleterious outcomes in terms of job attitudes and turnover.

Related to stress and emotional exhaustion is job burnout, defined as a “psychological state in which employees experience chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors in the work environment” (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010, p. 487). Stress and burnout are, however, not the same. Burnout represents an individual’s response to stressors and consists of emotional exhaustion (feeling drained and depleted by the emotional demands of work), depersonalisation/ cynicism (distancing oneself from the work situation) and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Campbell et al., 2013; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Meta-analytic findings show all three dimensions of burnout to be predictive of both turnover intentions and behaviour, although the relationship is much stronger with intentions than with actual turnover behaviour. Moreover, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation were found to be more strongly associated with turnover intentions than was diminished personal accomplishment.

Research also demonstrates that stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion do not only affect turnover through attitudinal variables such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, but can also have a direct effect on turnover. For example Wright and Cropanzano (1998), using a sample of social workers, found that emotional exhaustion, while significantly and positively related to turnover, was not significantly related to job satisfaction. Their research also found a strong negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance. Conservation of resources theory (COR) was used to explain their findings (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). Wright and Cropanzano argued that emotionally exhausted employees lack the additional resources (personal characteristics, conditions or energy) necessary to increase performance and to deal with stressors. They further suggested that rather than a single event affecting a single criterion at one point in time, emotional exhaustion accumulates over time as one negative outcome compounds another, up to the point where the employee feels burnt out and thus experiences a degree of compulsion to leave.

Studies such as Wright and Cropanzano's, which draw on alternative theoretical explanations for turnover such as COR theory, represent a departure from the predominant affect-driven turnover models. More importantly, at least with reference to this thesis, they offer useful insight into how stressful events such as disasters may impact turnover. Natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, hold both immediate and long-term consequences for individuals who experience them. Thus, while individuals may cope well with the initial impact of a disaster, referred to as the primary stressor; the longer-term impacts of secondary stressors, often experienced over several years, may lead to a depletion of personal resources and increased emotional exhaustion. To this end burnout, specifically emotional exhaustion, is a well-established consequence of natural disasters and other highly stressful life events (Collins & Long, 2003; Whittle, Walker, Medd, & Mort, 2012). Wright and Cropanzano's research suggests that individuals who experience sustained emotional exhaustion and depletion of personal resources may well leave an organisation as a consequence, despite being satisfied in their jobs. To date, however, no research has explored these ideas in relation to turnover in the post-crisis context.

Maslach et al. (2001) argue that burnout also leads to erosion of engagement with the job. Job or work engagement (terms used interchangeably in the literature) is defined as a positive work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). It is a mental state, not an attitude, in which the employee directs his or her full cognitive, physical and emotional self towards work performance (Kahn, 1990). Thus, burnout scholars conceptualise job engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Accordingly engagement is characterised by high energy, involvement and efficacy, whereas burnout is characterised by exhaustion, depersonalisation and inefficacy. Important in the definition of job engagement is that it is a state of mind, not an attitude. As such it is a more 'unstable' construct, thus likely to fluctuate over time as influenced by changing work conditions and work demands (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Applying this logic one might posit that a crisis or disaster is likely to impact on the extent to which employees are able to fully engage with their jobs, both immediately following a disaster event and over the course of a longer-term recovery. Conservation of resources theory, as well as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R)

model of burnout (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), can be used to support this proposition. In this regard Schaufeli et al. (2009) demonstrated that increased job demands and decreased resources results in increased burnout. Conversely they demonstrated that increased resources are associated with increased job engagement. It is fair to argue that crises have the potential to reduce both physical and emotional resources, and thus potentially erode job engagement, possibly resulting in turnover.

The relationship between job engagement and turnover has, however, yet to be fully understood. Job engagement is a relatively new construct, only emerging in the literature towards the late 1990's. As such, it does not feature as a prominent predictor in turnover models or meta-analytic reviews reported in the mainstream turnover literature. Meta-analytic reviews of antecedents and outcomes of job engagement studies do, however, offer some insight into the relationship between the two constructs. Reviews by Saks (2006) and Halbesleben (2010) demonstrated a relatively strong negative relationship between engagement dimensions and turnover intention, with correlations ranging from $r = -.22$ to $r = -.45$.

Although the correlations are relatively high in these meta-analyses, they should be interpreted with some caution for at least two reasons. First, both of these reviews made use of turnover intention as the outcome variable, rather than actual turnover behaviour. Secondly it is quite possible that in many of these studies turnover intention served as a 'criterion of convenience' in a broader study of job engagement, rather than being explicitly targeted as the criterion of interest in the study. As Russell (2013, p. 160) states "voluntary turnover is just one of a number of easily obtained criteria harvested for possible examination in multi-panel survey research designs". Therefore, while the straight correlation between the two variables appears to be high, one needs to consider the incremental contribution of job engagement over and above known predictors of turnover. In studies seeking to achieve this aim the results are less encouraging. For example, a longitudinal study by Halbesleben and Wheeler (2008) found that there was a significant correlation between engagement and turnover intention, however, when job satisfaction and organisational commitment were controlled for, the additional contribution of engagement was insignificant. Similarly,

Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, and Farr-Wharton (2012) found a non-significant relationship between engagement and turnover intention. Another example can be found in the multi-sample study by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), which analysed data from four different occupational groups. Their study examined the effects of both burnout and engagement on turnover intention. While they found both constructs to be related to turnover intention, burnout had a much stronger relationship with turnover. So while both academic and practitioner interest in job engagement continues to grow, its value as a predictor of actual turnover is yet to be fully demonstrated, or for that matter discounted.

A further group of work environment predictors that merits discussion involves interpersonal relations and social exchange in the workplace. Holtom et al. (2008) refer to this as the 'person-context' interface. Of particular relevance to burnout discussed above is perceived support from managers and co-workers. Adopting a progression of burnout hypothesis, Campbell et al. (2013) demonstrated that both perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS) had strong negative relationships emotional exhaustion, which in turn had strong positive relationships with depersonalisation, diminished sense of accomplishment and turnover intention. Outside of the burnout-turnover relationship, perceived support has been shown to also have both direct and indirect effects on turnover intentions and turnover (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007).

The impact of perceived organisational support has most commonly been explained through social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), whereby a high level of POS increases affective commitment towards the organisation. Furthermore, based on the norm of reciprocity, POS is met with felt obligation by the employee to help the organisation thereby increasing normative commitment. Thus, POS is theorised to influence turnover through both affective and normative commitment as well as job satisfaction. Indeed Allen et al.'s (2003) study demonstrated that the POS-turnover is fully mediated by job satisfaction and organisational commitment, with the strongest relationship being through organisational commitment.

The relationship between PSS and turnover has, until recently, been shown to be fully mediated through POS (Eisenberger et al., 2002). The assumption being that the supervisor is representative of, or embodies, the organisation. An exemplary study by Maertz et al. (2007) demonstrated, however, that PSS had independent effects on turnover not mediated through POS. In addition they demonstrated an interactive effect between the two forms of support such that low PSS strengthened the negative relationship between POS and turnover, while high PSS weakened it. In support of leader-member exchange theory, their findings suggest that employees form individual relationships and attachments with supervisors and that these are distinct from attitudes held in relation to the broader organisation. Maertz et al. (2007) argued that a strong attachment to a specific supervisor reduces the salience of support received from the broader organisation. This offers some support for the commonly used maxim that 'employee leave managers, not organisations'. In relation to the present study this raises interesting questions regarding the impact of support offered to employees following a disaster event and how this may impact post-crisis employee turnover.

Although the relationship between PSS, POS, and turnover has not been studied in a post-crisis context, the relationship between these variables and other attitudes and withdrawal behaviours has been studied. For example, a study by Byron and Peterson (2002) following the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York demonstrated that employees who perceived a high level of organisational support following the attacks were less likely to report dissatisfaction with their jobs and also less likely to be absent from work. Their study did not measure turnover intentions or actual turnover behaviour, thus one is unable to draw firm conclusions regarding the dissatisfaction-turnover relationship, or make any inference as to the possible relationship between absenteeism and turnover. Furthermore they collected their data ten weeks after the initial event, thereby failing to take the longer term impacts of the event and recovery into consideration. This is particularly problematic given their finding that there was no significant relationship between perceived support and psychological strain experienced as a consequence of the event. This finding suggests that the role of POS and PSS as a predictor of turnover may be less salient in a post-crisis context, although this has yet to be explored by turnover scholars.

A final predictor worthy of discussion in this section is that of job embeddedness (JE). This construct has deliberately been left to last as job embeddedness represents a relatively dramatic departure from turnover research convention. Most turnover models seek to explain why people leave. The job embeddedness construct was first introduced by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, et al. (2001) in an attempt to identify the factors that influence people to stay in their jobs. While their focus on staying represented a departure from tradition, the more significant shift lay in the deliberate decision to break away from the dominant attitudes-alternatives models.

Job embeddedness is distinct from constructs such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Crossley, Bennett, Jex, & Burnfield, 2007). It is not an attitude, rather it is a general attachment construct defined as: “the combined on-the-job and off-the-job psychological, social, and financial influences that keep a person from leaving his or her job” (Zhang, Fried, & Griffeth, 2012, p. 221). The JE construct considers that employees are ‘situated’ or connected in a social web, which includes job and community-related connections and consists of three dimensions, referred to broadly as links; fit; and sacrifice.

JE is high when an employee has extensive *links* to people and institutions, both within and external to the organisation. These can be links to work and non-work friends, groups and community affiliations and the physical environment within which they operate. A high level of JE is further associated the employee’s perceived level of *fit* or comfort with their job, as well as within their community. The perceived material and psychological costs of leaving, referred to as *sacrifice*, make up the third dimension of the JE construct. In two studies, one of hospital employees and the other retail employees, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, et al. (2001) demonstrated JE to be negatively correlated with voluntary turnover. More importantly, their studies demonstrated that JE significantly predicted turnover after controlling for traditional predictors such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and perceived alternatives. In the decade that followed numerous studies have examined the JE-turnover relationship and have offered substantial support for Mitchell et al.’s initial findings (Crossley et al., 2007; Felps et al., 2009; Holtom, & Inderrieden, E.J., 2006; Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010; Smith, Holtom, & Mitchell,

2011; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). A recent meta-analysis, the first of the JE literature, further confirmed the importance of JE in predicting turnover (Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012). Disappointingly, however, the results of the meta-analysis showed that the incremental variance in turnover explained by the construct is significant, but small ($R^2 = .05$ for turnover intentions, and $R^2 = .03$ for actual turnover). Thus, while the construct does contribute to the explanation of turnover variance, it does not represent the 'holy grail' which turnover researchers continue to pursue.

Proximal predictors: Turnover intentions, perceived alternatives and job search behaviour

The basic path model depicted earlier in Figure 2.1 indicated that most turnover models have a temporal aspect to them, that is distal influences are presented first, intervening attitudinal and attachment variables next, and more proximal or direct antecedents, such as turnover intentions, precede actual turnover (Hom et al., 2012). This largely stems from the work of Mobley et al. (1979) and others, such as Hom and Kinicki (2001), who sought to explicate the causal mechanisms by which job dissatisfaction progresses to actual turnover. Three constructs feature prominently in the turnover literature as mediators of the attitude-turnover relationship: perceived alternatives; turnover intentions; and job search behaviour.

Perceived alternatives – Traditional conceptions of the voluntary turnover process assume that the employee has full discretion in the decision to leave. However, in many instances the extent of this discretion is tempered by labour market conditions and the availability of alternative employment opportunities. In this regard distinction is often made between actual labour market conditions and employee perceptions of the labour market or alternative opportunities. Economic explanations of the turnover process are based on quantifiable and objective measures of labour market conditions (Morrell et al., 2001), often reported as an aggregate for collective social units such as regions, industries or occupations (Steel & Griffeth, 1989). As a result of this aggregation, these models tend to demonstrate a strong relationship between unemployment levels and turnover levels, such that in times of high employment turnover rates tend to increase (Gerhart, 1990; Trevor, 2001). Economic

explanations are most often also based on the assumption that employees leave an organisation with a goal of moving on to gainful employment elsewhere, that is the decision to leave one employer in favour of another. They are further premised on the assumption that employees have perfect knowledge of the labour market and associated opportunities in labour market.

Psychological accounts of the turnover process have tended to depart from the above assumptions. Instead they focus on the individual's *perceived* ease of movement. Subjective perceptions of available alternatives are used to estimate the impact of labour market conditions on turnover decisions (Griffeth, Steel, Allen, & Bryan, 2005). This stems historically from the work of March and Simon (1958), and also Mobley et al.'s (1979) intermediate linkages model. Mobley hypothesised that dissatisfaction leads to thoughts of quitting, which in turn prompt an individual to engage in a search for and subsequent evaluation of alternatives. This directly influences turnover intentions. Thus, perceived alternatives is theorised to be an antecedent of turnover intentions. While this linear path is intuitively appealing, operationalising search and evaluation variables has proven difficult for turnover scholars (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012; Steel & Griffeth, 1989). As a result meta-analytic findings suggest that, while common to many turnover models, perceptual measures of employment opportunity are only modestly predictive ($r = .12$) of actual turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). For such a proximal indicator of actual turnover, the predictive validity of this construct is disappointing and its role in explaining turnover remains equivocal. As such, it has been the subject of considerable scrutiny by turnover scholars, as discussed below.

Conceptual as well as methodological explanations have been offered for the weak alternatives-turnover relationship. Methodological arguments centre on how the construct has been operationalised and measured. Historically, turnover scholars have relied on oversimplified self-report survey measures of perceived alternatives (Griffeth et al., 2005; Hom et al., 2017). Such measures have tended to focus on either the perceived number of alternatives available or the quality of available alternatives, or both (Steel & Griffeth, 1989). Measures that focus on the perceived number of alternatives include the ease of obtaining alternative employment, perceptions regarding the actual number of alternatives available,

and perceptions of occupational demand (Steel, 1996). Measures that focus on the quality of alternatives generally require participants to indicate the degree to which they believe they will be able to secure a job of the same, or better, quality outside of the organisation. The diversity evident in the measures can be taken as indicative of the differences in meaning attached to the construct and also the varying theoretical importance placed on the construct in turnover models.

Aside from their content, the nature of perceived alternative measures has also been shown to be problematic. The vast majority of measures found in the literature are single-item measures (see Steel and Griffeth, 1989 for examples). Griffeth et al. (2005) contend that such a unidimensional approach to a multi-dimensional construct is inadequate, and thus partly to blame for such poor predictive utility. To address this, they developed a multi-dimensional measure of job market perceptions, which they termed the Employment Opportunity Index (EOI). The EOI is a 14-item measure tapping into five separate dimensions, namely ease of movement; desirability of movement; networking; crystallisation of alternatives; and mobility. In a study involving 500 employees from a large insurance company, Griffeth et al. (2005) examined whether the new EOI measure accounted for more variance in turnover than traditional perceived alternatives variables, which they estimated was between 5% – 7%. Their findings showed that EOI explained 10% of the variance in actual turnover, with the authors claiming that “this represents a dramatic increase” (p. 347) in the explained variance of earlier studies. As their findings suggest, methodological refinement has the potential to improve the predictive utility of turnover models. Whether these refinements represent as ‘dramatic’ an improvement as Griffeth et al. (2005) claim, or rather ‘tinkering at the edges’ is open to debate.

Beyond methodological reasons one must consider theoretical explanations for the consistently weak findings in the perceived alternatives domain. For example, Michaels and Spector (1982) contended that perceived alternatives play an insignificant role as an antecedent of turnover intentions. Rather, they argued that the availability of a tangible employment alternative “works in concert with”, not through, turnover intentions to directly influence the turnover decision at the point of action (p. 58). Given that criterion data is

generally collected between 3 – 12 months after initial predictor measurement, traditional survey based measures of perceived alternatives are unlikely to capture the presence of a tangible alternative at the time of the turnover decision being made (Steel, 2002). Such an approach to turnover research also does not account for the fact that an employee may leave suddenly and without a consideration of alternatives following a shock or an attractive unsolicited job offer (Maertz & Campion, 2004).

This leads to a further theoretical argument. Almost all measures of perceived alternatives, including the EOI, make reference to the availability or attractiveness of alternative employment. This is indicative of the inherent assumption in the core turnover models that the individual leaves one organisation to go to the next, and that the main motivation for leaving is to secure a better job elsewhere. While this may be true for many employees, it is surely not the case for all leavers. Arguably many people leave employment to pursue non-work interests, full-time study, family commitments and other non-employment related pursuits. Lee and Mitchell (1994) demonstrated this fact with their unfolding model of turnover. Someone leaving to a non-work setting is far less likely to evaluate employment opportunities or engage in active job search behaviour. It is thus quite plausible that job market perceptions play a less salient role in turnover decisions for people exiting the employment market. Yet most studies fail to collect data on actual turnover destinations, thereby not allowing for these ideas to be more fully explored. Improving the predictive utility of perceived alternatives (and other predictors) may therefore require the refinement of the turnover criterion space, and not just improvements in predictor measurement, as recently proposed by Hom et al. (2012).

Job search behaviour – As discussed above, most turnover models assume employees leave to alternative employment. It is therefore not surprising that these models include job search as a core mechanism in turnover decisions, and in most cases a necessary precursor to leaving. Boswell et al. (2012, p. 129) define job search behaviour as “the time and effort expended on acquiring job market information and generating employment opportunities”. General perceptions of the labour market are theorised to influence job search behaviour, such that high perceived alternatives serve to stimulate an active search for alternative

employment (Blau, 1993). Job search behaviour is therefore deemed to be a more proximal predictor of turnover than perceived alternatives. Indeed meta-analytic findings suggest job search behaviour is a more robust predictor of turnover than perceived alternatives, although only marginally so, $r = .26$ (Griffeth et al., 2000). Unlike perceived alternatives, job search refers to actual manifest behaviour, not perception. As such, the construct has been easier to operationalise for turnover researchers, resulting in fewer measurement and methodological constraints. One therefore needs to examine alternative explanations for the routinely low predictive validity of such an instrumental mechanism in turnover decisions.

Not all job search behaviour is undertaken with the purpose of leaving in mind. Employees undertake a job search for a number of reasons, including obtaining bargaining leverage in their current employment situation, prospecting potential occupational shifts, or simply to stay aware of opportunities in the employment market, i.e. 'keeping one's finger on the pulse'. Furthermore, not all job search behaviour is triggered by dissatisfaction with the present job. As Steel (2002, p. 354) notes "satisfied employees may routinely scan the job market with a view to improving their current situation". Accordingly Boswell, Boudreau, and Dunford (2004) theorise that different job search objectives lead to differing outcomes. They distinguish between leverage-seeking and separation-seeking job search objectives. Their findings from a longitudinal study of 587 senior managers demonstrated the two forms of job search behaviour to be unique and uncorrelated constructs, and further that these were differentially related to subsequent use of leverage and separation. Leverage-seeking job search was positively associated with actual use of leverage one year later, whereas separation-seeking job search was not. Similarly, separation-seeking job search was strongly associated with actual leaving one year later, whereas leverage seeking was not. Boswell et al.'s (2004) study was the first to differentiate between job search objectives. Prior studies had not done this, which likely has contributed to the modest predictive validity.

Another explanation lies in the fact that not every individual who searches for a job with a view to leaving, will be able to find one that is suitable. While it has been demonstrated that higher levels of job search activity and effort are associated with more job offers being received (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001), there is no guarantee in this. As such

numerous moderators of the job search-turnover relationship have been identified including personality, job embeddedness, actual number of alternatives available, job search self-efficacy, and even job satisfaction (Kanfer et al., 2001; Swider, Boswell, & Zimmerman, 2011).

A third explanation can be found in the relationship between affect-related variables and job search. It is quite plausible that an employee becomes more, rather than less, satisfied or committed to the organisation following an active job search. The comparison of alternatives derived from a job search with one another, and with the present job, may well result in the employee reaching the conclusion that the utility in staying outweighs that of leaving. Job search therefore has the potential influence work-related attitudes. Steel's (2002) evolutionary search model captures this idea well, suggesting that job search processes operate in parallel, rather than sequentially, with job affect processes. Characterised by learning and the perpetual acquisition of job market information, the model proposes a dynamic job search process in which employees move through three distinct phases of job search (passive scanning, focussed search, and contacting prospective employers). Steel argues that as job search intensifies the employee acquires more accurate knowledge of his or her employability, or otherwise, within the prevailing job market. Thus individuals nearer to the actual decision to quit will have more accurate job information at their disposal than an employee who is merely 'scanning the environment'. Consequentially an employee may modify job search behaviour, including cessation, as the job search progresses. Such temporal features of the job search process are not evident in most turnover models and are also not captured by the static or single time lag research designs utilised in the majority of turnover studies.

As alluded to in the earlier discussion of perceived alternatives, a final and, often less considered explanation, lies in the fact that many employees simply leave without considering alternatives or actively looking for another job. The notion of impulsive quitting has long been recognised by turnover scholars. For example, Mobley (1977) acknowledged that impulsive quitting could take place without rational job-search processes, however he failed to elaborate on how this form of quitting takes place or what might drive it (Maertz & Campion, 2004). This conceptual 'blinker' perpetuated turnover research for almost 30 years following

Mobley's model. It is only within the last 15 years that turnover scholars have begun to question the centrality of perceived alternatives and job search behaviour in the turnover decision process [see for example Lee and Mitchell (1994); Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, et al. (2001); Steel (2002); Maertz and Griffeth (2004)]. These alternative accounts of the turnover process are discussed more fully in later sections of this review.

Turnover intentions - Much of the preceding discussion has described correlates of turnover that demonstrate weak to modest predictive validity. Turnover intentions, however, buck this trend and are generally considered to be the most proximal and robust predictor of actual turnover behaviour. Turnover intentions were first introduced by Mobley (1977) in his intermediate linkages model, which sought to outline the cognitive steps linking dissatisfaction with actual turnover. Drawing heavily on the theories of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and task motivation (Locke, 1968), he proposed that intent to leave was the variable immediately preceding actual turnover. Tett and Meyer (1993, p. 262) define turnover intention as "the conscious and deliberate wilfulness to leave the organisation", often measured with reference to a specific timeframe. For example, a commonly used item for measuring turnover intention is "I plan to leave my job in the next 6 months". Results from multiple meta-analytic reviews indicate a relatively strong positive association, ($r = .38$ to $.65$) between turnover intentions and actual turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993). This represents considerable improvement compared to other more distal predictors. As a result, turnover intentions have become a mainstay construct in most turnover models (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009).

In fact, many studies view turnover intentions as part of the criterion space, utilising intentions as a proxy or substitute for actual turnover behaviour. The reasons why researchers engage in such practice are well summarised by Bergman et al. (2012, p. 867), who point out that investigations are commonly limited to turnover intentions because (a) it is easier to collect this information at the same time as predictor data is collected; (b) researchers do not want to wait 6 – 24 months for actual turnover behaviour data; and/or (c) for whatever reason the researcher is unable to gather turnover behaviour data. Hom et al. (2012) strongly oppose this practice, arguing that doing so ignores potential mediators and

moderators of the intention-turnover relationship. There are sound reasons for them making this argument. Although turnover intentions represent the best known predictor of actual turnover, a sizeable portion of the variance in almost all studies remains unexplained, as not everyone that intends to quit actually does so. Furthermore, although meta-analyses demonstrate a strong association between intentions and turnover, the magnitude of the correlations between the two variables varies considerably across studies, as do the associated credibility intervals. This variability suggests that several factors may moderate the intention-turnover relationship and consequently limit an employee's ability, or attenuate their desire, to translate intent into behaviour (Allen, 2004a). Full volitional control, an assumption in the original theory of reasoned action, upon which Mobley based his model, may thus not exist to the same degree for all leavers. Rather, Hom et al. (2012) suggest that decision control is best represented along a continuum which runs from little or no control over the decision to leave to full control. Yet decision control has seldom been studied, even considered, in the past. Neither have the moderators of the intention-turnover relationship. Predictive designs, utilising cross-sectional data, simply do not allow one to examine circumstantial limitations or contextual influences on actual turnover decisions. The variables to be measured in any given study are determined at its inception and then fixed in time, even in studies employing more longitudinal designs. A similar problem exists for studies that purposefully seek to identify potential moderators of the intention-turnover relationship. For example, Allen, Moffit, and Weeks (2005) examined the moderating effects of personality, risk aversion, and locus of control on the intention-turnover relationship. These potential moderators still needed to be identified at the start of the study. Thus all predictive designs come with this limitation; they are incapable of identifying, from data, new predictors, mediators or moderators of turnover. Put slightly differently, they are not able to capture the nuanced, dynamic and highly complex nature of individual turnover decisions (Morrell & Arnold, 2007). Qualitative research approaches that gather data directly from leavers and ask them to describe their actual decision to leave are more suited to this aim, however, as Steel and Lounsbury (2009, p. 9) suggest such studies are most notable for their absence in the turnover literature.

Summary – the contribution of the predictive agenda.

The preceding review emphasised that much of the current research on voluntary turnover derives from early models proposed by March and Simon (1958); Mobley (1977); Mobley et al. (1979); Steers and Mowday (1981) and Price and Mueller (1981). Inherent in these attitudinal path models are several assumptions. First, they assume a rational decision process influenced primarily by dissatisfaction with the job and the perceived availability of alternatives. They are also premised on the assumption that quitting is an individual decision based on interaction between the individual and their work environment. Lastly, they construe turnover decisions as a step-by-step sequential process derived from dissatisfaction that progress in a relatively predictable order. The above review shows that over the past 60+ years a plethora of studies have sought to validate and build on these models through the addition of numerous distal antecedents, mediators, moderators, and proximal antecedents of turnover. The current state of knowledge regarding turnover correlates and predictors is summarised in Figure 2.2 below, adapted from Holtom et al. (2008). The figure does not represent an exhaustive list of all known predictors, but rather a summary of the more salient variables.

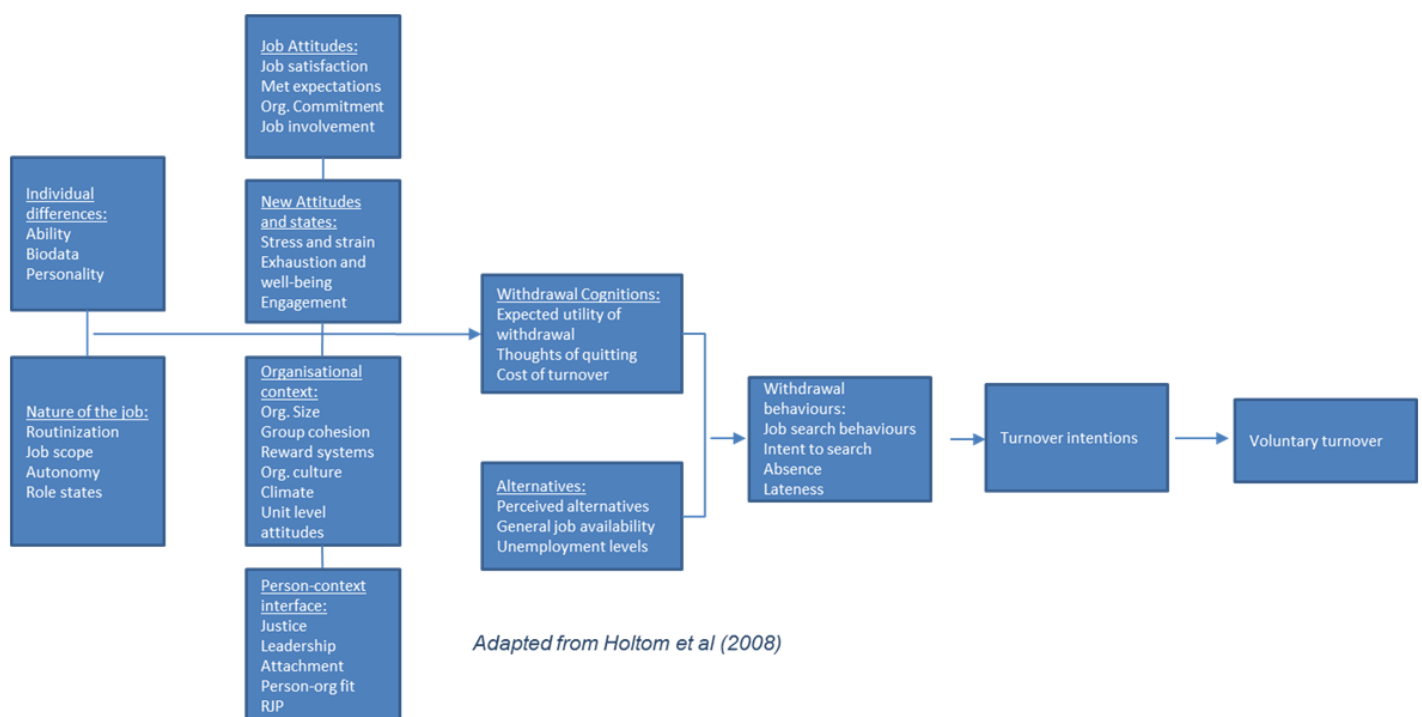


Figure 2.2. Expanded model of turnover predictors

To reiterate, the net result of much of this research is a large body of empirical support for a somewhat modest relationship between job dissatisfaction, perceived alternatives, turnover intentions, and turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). Meta-analytic findings show that these core mechanisms are indeed consistent predictors of turnover behaviour; it is just that they only explain a small amount of the total variance in turnover, generally between 15% - 20% (Holtom et al., 2008; Hom et al., 2012; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Russell, 2013). Much of the criterion variance remains therefore unexplained by existing turnover models (Hom & Griffeth, 2013; Russell, 2013). Such disappointing results may raise doubts as to the utility of all of this research. I would argue, however, that it has not been in vain. Without question, these studies have advanced our understanding of voluntary turnover considerably since the seminal works of March and Simon; Mobley; Price and others. However, the dominance of these seminal models, together with a seemingly unwavering focus on prediction, has served to constrain theoretical development in the field and place limitations on our ability to understand the actual processes involved in turnover decision making. Maertz (2012, p. 859) goes as far as suggesting that “maximising prediction is not a crucial research goal in the turnover area any longer”, a view shared by Russell (2013, p. 168) who suggests that:

“...history strongly suggests survey measures of employee attitudes or perceptions are unlikely to explain more than 15 – 20% of the variance in voluntary turnover.... those who are truly interested in understanding and managing employee decisions to voluntarily quit their jobs should look beyond what Hom et al. (2012) consider the ‘holy grail’ chase for the survey measure of a work attitude or job perception that finally breaks the $R^2 \sim .20$ barrier”

These same concerns were raised by Maertz and Campion (1998) a decade early who argued that the survey data collected by most studies operating within the prediction agenda do not directly address how the decision process occurs. Rather they “measure current standing on hypothetical psychological steps assumed to occur in the employee’s mind” (p. 61). In the absence of alternative, that is more qualitative and in-depth, approaches to the study of turnover, establishing whether these hypothesised steps actually occur during the turnover process is problematic. Maertz and Campion (1998) and Russell (2013) are not the first turnover scholars to call for alternative approaches to the study of turnover decision

making, and no doubt they will not be the last. Addressing this call requires, however, a departure from the theoretical assumptions and methodological traditions that have dominated the discipline for well over 50 years.

The first, and arguably most influential, shift away from the afore-mentioned traditional models of turnover came in the form of Lee and Mitchell's (1994) Unfolding Model of Turnover. Other significant alternative models include Maertz and Campion's (2004) Eight Motivational Forces model, and more recently Hom et al.'s (2012) Proximal Withdrawal States model. In the section that follows specific emphasis is, however, placed on discussing the unfolding model of turnover given that this model incorporates shock-induced turnover and is thus of particular relevance to the present study. Placing a specific emphasis on the unfolding model does not diminish in any way the contributions offered by the many other models of turnover evident in the literature. Indeed, Steel and Lounsbury (2009) identify no fewer than 24 different turnover models. Many of these are derivatives of the predominant models discussed above and thus demonstrate a high level of theoretical convergence in terms of the core turnover mechanisms identified earlier. As such these models are not discussed in detail in this section. Furthermore, a detailed discussion of all of these models is beyond the scope of this literature review.

The Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover

Lee and Mitchell (1994) argued that quitting need not be the result of accumulated job dissatisfaction, but can occur with very little evaluation of alternatives and often as a result of an 'environmental shock'. Their unfolding model proposes five different decision paths that an employee might follow when making the decision to leave the organisation.

The conceptual roots of the unfolding model derive from image theory (Beach, 1990; Beach & Mitchell, 1987). According to image theory, the turnover decision-making process involves less extensive evaluation of alternatives and a greater use of screening and pre-programmed behaviour. Basing their original model on these assumptions, Lee and Mitchell (1994) made a provocative departure from existing turnover theory at the time, arguing that

not all turnover decisions are the result of a deliberate and rational decision-making process. They describe the turnover process as involving several key processes. The first of these is what they term a 'shock to the system' or simply 'a shock'. They defined a shock as a "distinguishable event that jars employees towards deliberate judgements about their jobs" (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, p. 60). Such shocks serve to initiate the psychological processes involved in leaving and can originate internally or externally to the organisation and can be positive, negative or neutral, as well as expected or unexpected (Holtom et al., 2005). Lee and Mitchell (1994) argued that only those events which cause the employee to engage in job-related deliberations are classified as shocks.

The experience of a shock results in the employee engaging in a second process, which Lee and Mitchell (1994:61) refer to as the "engaged script". This involves the employee searching his/her memory for a pre-existing plan or response based on decision rules or learned responses to similar shocks in the past. If a matching script exists, the script is executed quite rapidly. If this script involves quitting as an appropriate response, the employee will leave with very little deliberation or evaluation of alternatives. Such a decision process departs significantly from the rational decision processes described in earlier traditional models of turnover.

Drawing directly from image theory is the third process involved in the unfolding model whereby, in the absence of a script, employees make use of value, trajectory and strategic image judgements to evaluate their basic attachment and commitment to the organisation (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, p. 65). An "image violation" occurs when, after a compatibility test, the employee concludes that his/her values, goals and strategies for goal attainment no longer fit with the organisation as a result of the shock experienced. An image violation can cause an employee to quit the organisation immediately and without the consideration of alternatives, or it can result in the employee experiencing increased job dissatisfaction. Similar to the role of job satisfaction and other work attitudes in traditional turnover models, the experienced disaffection with the job prompts the employee to search for and evaluate employment alternatives. Lee and Mitchell (1994) point out, however, that not all image violations result in turnover or a search for alternatives. In some instances the

experienced shock and subsequent image violation will result in the employee adjusting his or her image to better fit with the organisation. The unfolding model is theorised to have five decision paths that employees can follow when making the decision to leave the organisation.

Decision path 1 - In decision path 1, the employee experiences a shock. This causes the employee to search his/her memory for an existing script of past decisions, rules or learned responses relating to similar shocks in the past. If an appropriate script is found to exist and the script involves quitting, the act of quitting is enacted quickly and with little evaluation of the employee's attachment to the organisation or possible alternatives. If a matching script is not found a different decision path is evoked (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Lee et al., 1999).

Decision path 2 - Decision path 2 is also initiated by a shock, and in the majority of cases, the shock is negative. However, unlike decision path 1, a matching script does not exist. The absence of a script triggers the employee to make image judgements, akin to a compatibility test, about how well he/she can integrate the shock with personal values, goals and actions. If the judgement is that the shock does not fit with any of the images, the employee will decide to either quit the organisation or adapt the image and stay. Similar to path 1, this decision path does not involve a search for and evaluation of alternatives. A clear difference between paths 1 and 2 is that in decision path 2 the employee gives consideration to both the job and job satisfaction prior to making the decision to quit. This does not occur in path 1 (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Decision path 3 - Decision path 3 begins in the same way as path 2, with the experience of a shock, a memory search and the failure to find a suitable matching script. As in path 2, the employee engages in an image comparison and the lack of fit results in an image violation. As a result of the image violation the employee experiences job dissatisfaction, which prompts the employee to search for alternatives. In a further compatibility test the identified alternatives are evaluated against images, thus the employee evaluates the fit of both staying and leaving. If an alternative offers greater benefits to the employee than the current organisation the employee will quit, if not the employee stays (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Decision paths 4a and 4b - Decision path 4 differs from the other three paths in that it is not initiated by a shock. Rather over time, either the employee or organisation change, such that elements of the job no longer fit with the images held by the employee and an image violation occurs. Similar to path 3 the image violation results in the employee experiencing job dissatisfaction. At this point path 4 splits into two possibilities. In path 4a the image violation results in such dissatisfaction being experienced that the employee leaves without searching for or evaluating alternatives. The employee simply quits when he or she realises they are unhappy (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). In path 4b, the unfolding model is very similar to the traditional intermediate linkages model of turnover whereby, an employee, on experiencing job dissatisfaction, will search for and evaluate job alternatives, think about quitting, express an intention to quit and ultimately leave the organisation. Figure 2.3 depicts the various paths of the unfolding model.

Decision Path Prototypes for Leavers							
Decision Path	Shock	Matching Script	Image Violation	Dissatisfaction	Job Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Offer in hand
1	Yes	Yes	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
3	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes ^a	Yes	Yes
4a	No	No	Yes	Yes	No ^b	No	No
4b	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 2.3. Lee and Mitchell's Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover

Tests and limitations of the unfolding model

The first test of the unfolding model was reported by Lee et al. in (1996). Their qualitative study of 44 leavers from the nursing profession demonstrated considerable support for the model's paths with 75 per cent of the cases being accurately described by the theorised decision paths. Their data also showed the turnover process to be more complicated than suggested by traditional turnover models. For example, only 55 per cent of the leavers reported job dissatisfaction prior to leaving, with a number of people leaving as a result of shocks unrelated to their job or the organisation. In many instances these shocks

were positive rather than negative. Lee et al.'s (1999) later test of the unfolding model made use of improved classification criteria and a refinement of the model's decision paths. In their study involving 229 accountant leavers they were able to improve the classification accuracy of the unfolding model to 92 per cent, with only 17 of the 229 cases remaining unclassified.

In their study of 46 accountant leavers Donnelly and Quirin (2006) reported that 42 (91 per cent) could be classified into one of the four paths of the unfolding model. Some caution does need to be exercised when interpreting these results due to the relatively small sample size, but more importantly the very low response rate (14%) reported in the study. Morrell et al. (2008) also report some support for the generalisability of the unfolding model with 77 per cent (271 of 352) of leavers being successfully classified in their study. Their findings provided strong evidence that shocks play an important part in many decisions to quit, often acting as a catalyst to overcome personal inertia or embeddedness. Morrell et al.'s findings also demonstrate the importance of contextual factors on the turnover process. For example they argue that nurses in the UK National Health Service are likely to experience more negative shocks, due to institutional pressures and resource constraints, than US accountants (Lee & Mitchell, 1999) and that they are more likely to have an offer in hand when deciding to quit due to the labour market shortage for nurses.

While the above studies seem to provide strong evidence in support of the unfolding model, studies by Niederman et al. (2007) and Holt et al. (2007) report a high percentage of cases where leavers followed non-theorized paths. In both these studies the authors extended the original unfolding model by including additional new paths to explain unclassified cases of turnover. First, Niederman et al. (2007) collected data from 124 leavers in the IT profession and found that respondents followed one of 17 distinct decision paths, with only 12 per cent following paths from the original unfolding model. The majority of the leavers (68%) were classified as following one of three new paths, which Niederman et al. (2007) argue are likely to be unique to the IT workforce. The study by Niederman et al. (2007) is significant for two key reasons. Firstly, it was the first study to test the classification accuracy of the unfolding model with IT professionals and not accountants or nurses. Second, as in the case of Morrell et al. (2008), the study highlighted the complexity of turnover

decisions and the impact of contextual influences. In the case of the IT workforce it would appear that scripts play a more significant role in turnover, with 79 per cent of the respondents reporting the use of scripts. In another test of the unfolding model Holt et al. (2007) examined the turnover decisions of 182 military personnel. Similar to Niederman et al. (2007) and Morrell et al. (2008), they identified additional decision paths that appear to be unique to the military work environment. In their study only 47 per cent (86 of 182) of respondents were classified into one of the five original paths specified by the unfolding model. By including two additional paths Holt et al. (2007) were able to classify a further 36 per cent of turnover cases, leaving only 17 per cent unexplained. Holt et al. argue that the two additional decision paths are unique to the military work environment, further highlighting the importance of contextual influences on turnover decision making.

The studies by Niederman et al. (2007) and Holt et al. (2007), and perhaps to a lesser extent Morrell et al. (2008) are important in the sense that while they offer some support for the validity of the unfolding model's paths, they also suggest that turnover decision making is influenced by contextual and relational complexities. They further suggest that the unfolding model, as with traditional turnover models, does have its limitations. Morrell et al. (2008:147) argue that scope remains for further theoretical development, refinement and testing of the unfolding model.

To date most tests of the unfolding model have been in the form of replications and modest extensions of the original model (Holtom, Burton, & Crossley, 2012). In moving beyond simple replication, additional research is required to further explicate the causal mechanisms that underlie each of the model's paths. One such area of research relates to the role that shocks play in turnover decisions. There is now little doubt that the addition of shocks as key 'drivers' of turnover has advanced our understanding of turnover decision making considerably (Hom et al., 2017). Indeed, Holtom et al. (2005) demonstrated that shocks cause voluntary departures more often than accumulated job dissatisfaction. That said, the causal mechanisms by which shocks lead to turnover have yet to be fully explained. Part of the problem lies in the way in which shocks have typically been defined. To date, shocks have been narrowly and strictly defined as 'jarring events that lead to turnover

deliberations'. Holtom et al. (2005, p. 341) go as far as stating that unless an event leads to job-related deliberations that involve leaving, it is not a shock. This represents an overly restrictive definition of a shock. Arguably a jarring event may very well set in motion other actions or circumstances which subsequently lead one to deliberate about leaving the organisation. Using Holtom et al.'s definition one would omit such shock from the decision sequence, whereas I would argue that the shock remains a salient aspect of the decision to leave, albeit somewhat distal from the actual decision to leave. This argument is particularly relevant to the present study and the post-crisis context, where one's initial or immediate reaction to the primary shock (i.e. the first earthquake in this study) may not involve deliberations about employment, however, the shock may still initiate the leaving process by disrupting routine and altering personal circumstances.

Additional issues of definition that merit discussion include the fact that shocks are typically construed as static, one-off events that are experienced by an individual. To date no research has considered the dynamic nature of shocks; the cumulative impact of multiple shocks; or the impact of a large extra-organisational shock that is commonly experienced by all employees. Thus the possibility that the same shock may be perceived to hold a different magnitude, or differentially impact turnover decision making, has yet to be explored fully. Additionally, shocks have been defined as the 'initiating mechanism' engendering the turnover decision-making process; very few studies have sought to examine the level of influence that this 'initial shock' exerts on the actual final decision to leave (Kulik et al., 2012; Morrell, Loan-Clarke, & Wilkinson, 2004a). As Morrell et al. (2004a) point out, most studies of the unfolding model fail to acknowledge that an initial shock does not necessarily have to directly influence the final decision to leave. It is, for example, quite plausible that a single shock could initiate a process of decision making, but, on its own the initial shock may be insufficient to result in leaving. Additional shocks, or a set of circumstances experienced after the initial shock, may be what ultimately results in leaving and thereby constitute the actual motives for leaving (Bergman et al., 2012). Such reasoning does not negate, however, the impact of the original shock as a part of the decision sequence; rather it suggests there are temporal, contextual and processual differences in the way in which shocks may lead to turnover. Studies exploring such possibilities are, however, not prevalent in the turnover

literature and the interplay between initial shocks, final shocks and the actual eventual reasons for leaving is therefore in need of closer examination.

There are other aspects of the unfolding model which are equally problematic. As an example Maertz and Campion (1998) point out the Unfolding Model does not adequately distinguish between script-driven quitting, and quitting which is merely quick and reflexive in nature. Both these forms of leaving are classified under the same path, when in fact they represent two quite different processes. Furthermore, scripts are very narrowly defined as ‘a pre-existing behavioural plan for leaving’, when in fact such scripts could well range in nature from well-defined plans with definite time frames to indefinite conditional plans (Maertz, 2012). It is plausible that the enactment of different scripts would involve differing decision sequences and timing, although this has yet to be examined.

The definitional and conceptual limitations discussed above are further compounded by methodological shortcomings in studies testing the unfolding model. While several tests of the model have sought to obtain qualitative data, most of these studies have employed highly structured and deductive research designs which made use of strict interview protocols or structured questionnaires to collect data from leavers [see for example (Holtom et al., 2012; Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Jones, Ross, & Sertyesilisik, 2010; Kulik et al., 2012; Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, et al., 1999; Morrell & Arnold, 2007; Niederman et al., 2007; Shipp, Furst-Holloway, Harris, & Rosen, 2013)]. In these studies the focus has most often been on establishing the presence or absence of a shock. Research participants are asked to indicate whether or not thoughts of quitting were precipitated by a significant event. Occasionally they are required to describe the event and provide an indication of the degree to which they feel the shock influenced their decision to leave. Very seldom are leavers actually asked to describe the full turnover decision-making process (see Donnelly and Quirin (2006) for an exception), or explicate exactly how the experienced shock motivated leaving. The ‘size’, ‘perceived impact’, frequency, and cumulative impact of the shock(s) has largely been ignored. Moreover, participants are typically asked to recall a ‘single jarring event’ (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, et al., 1999, p. 461) when in fact turnover deliberations may have been prompted by a sequence of shocks and not just one specific event. Similarly, structured

questions are used to assess the presence or absence of the other components of the unfolding model's various paths. Strict classification rules are used by researchers to assign leavers to the theorised paths (see Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, et al. (1999) or Holtom and Inderrieden (2006) for examples). Research approaches such as these fail to capture the true complexity of the decision-making process. As a result our understanding of precisely how shocks lead to leaving remains limited.

Thus, despite its theoretical appeal and obvious contribution to understanding turnover decision making, scope remains for further testing, refinement and expansion of the unfolding model. Maertz and Campion (2004) argue that the most fruitful area for such refinement lies in the integration of content and process models of turnover, whereby researchers strive to develop "motive-rich decision profiles in quitting" (p. 580).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter sought to provide a comprehensive review of the current state of turnover research and theory. It commenced by defining the phenomenon of voluntary turnover and explicating its consequences, both for the organisation and individual employee. The review highlighted that although much is already known regarding the factors that drive voluntary turnover, gaps in our understanding of actual turnover decision making remain, particularly when it comes to understanding shock-induced turnover. Further explication of these gaps, and a discussion of the ontological, epistemological and methodological reasons for their existence, is presented in the next chapter. Following which arguments are presented for an alternative qualitative approach to studying turnover decision making.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

INTRODUCTION

“...any methodology that attempts to understand experiences and explain situations will have to be complex.... it is important to capture as much of this complexity in our research as possible, at the same time knowing that capturing it all is virtually impossible...”

Corbin and Strauss (2008:8)

The preceding chapter demonstrated that while much is understood about voluntary turnover, there remain substantial gaps in our knowledge and further research in the field is warranted. In part these gaps have been attributed to the predominance of quantitative approaches to the study of turnover, despite the many calls for qualitative, in-depth, and more leaver-centric studies of voluntary turnover. This thesis is a response to this call and represents a departure from the predominantly quantitative methodologies in turnover research over the last 60 years (Allen, Hancock, & Vardaman, 2013). In this chapter the rationale for the choice of a qualitative research design, and more specifically a grounded theory approach, to the study is articulated. Arguments are presented in relation to the research purpose, as well as the ontological, epistemological and axiological beliefs of the researcher. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the specific grounded theory method employed in this thesis. In Chapter 4, which follows, details are provided on the operationalisation of the research method.

RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Researchers in the social sciences face several choices when designing a study. One central choice involves selecting to adopt either a qualitative or quantitative approach to the study, or some combination of these two. Both of these broad approaches have, at different times in recent history, held dominance in social science inquiry and the merits of each have been regularly and vigorously debated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Schwandt, 2000; Van Maanen, 1979). The intention here is not to resurface these debates or further dichotomise between the approaches. As Creswell (2007, p. 16) notes “qualitative research is legitimate in its own right and does not need to be compared to achieve respectability”. In the social sciences, as within any discipline, there exist multiple ways by

which knowledge might be generated, from reading a text to conducting a controlled experiment. Individual researchers must therefore decide among these and choose which approach to knowledge generation is most appropriate to address the research question at hand. While this choice is primarily informed by the research purpose or aims and the context within which the research occurs (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007), it is also influenced by the researcher's personal beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world in which we live. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to this as the 'research paradigm' of the researcher. Maxwell (2012a, p. 41), describes a research paradigm as consisting of the set of assumptions and beliefs held by the researcher about the nature of the world (ontological assumptions) and how one might go about understanding it (epistemological assumptions). A clear articulation of these assumptions is important in justifying the choice of research strategy, and ensuring congruency between research paradigm and research design.

Philosophical assumptions underpinning scholarly inquiry

Ontology concerns the nature of reality (both physical and social), existence, and the characteristics of the world that the researcher aims to understand (Creswell, 2007, p. 16). Ontology addresses questions such as 'What is the nature and form of reality, and what can be known of it?', 'Does a single, verifiable reality exist that is independent of the knower?', or 'Do multiple and complex realities exist, which are the creation of the researcher and subjects being studied?' Distinction is most often drawn between two opposing ontological positions of realism and relativism, although as Andrews (2012) notes it is more suitable to conceptualise these two positions as representing polarised perspectives on a continuum. At one end of the continuum, the realist ontology assumes that a knowable and objective reality exists independently of our perceptions, theories, or constructions of it. Maxwell (2012b, p. 5), in citing Lakoff (1987), notes that researchers operating at the extreme end of a realist ontology (naïve realism) contend that there is only one correct way in which reality can be divided up into objects, properties and relations, and therefore explained. The social world, as with the physical/natural world, is taken to be a concrete structure "out there", composed of a network of determinate relationships between constituent parts. Discoveries are to be made in concrete behaviour between these constituent parts, through accurate observation

and measurement (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 495). Such an objectivist stance on reality is problematic for social science researchers, particularly qualitative researchers, who adopt a more relativist ontology and embrace the idea of multiple realities. A strictly relativist ontology (idealism) views reality as a social construction that is confined to the mind, that is it consists only of ideas and perception. Knowledge of this reality is created intersubjectively through meanings and interpretations developed socially and experientially. The social world is taken to be a continuous process that is re-created afresh as individuals impose themselves on their world in order to establish meaning (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Because of differing individual and group perspectives, multiple realities exist for the relativist and no amount of repeated inquiry will result in convergence upon one single reality or 'truth' (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

Andrews (2012) contends that the two polarised extremities of the realist/relativist continuum are equally problematic for researchers in the social sciences, arguing that a strong realist position ignores the impact that the researcher has on interpreting and presenting findings; while a strong relativist ontology concludes that nothing can ever be known for definite and that no one reality holds precedence over another in its claim to truth about a social phenomenon. Several, less extreme, ontological positions such as critical realism exist along the continuum and are discussed more fully under the research paradigms that follow later in this section. Differing ontological assumptions about the nature of reality have implications for how one goes about understanding the world and acquiring knowledge about it. Ontology therefore has epistemological implications.

Epistemology refers to the study of “the nature of knowledge and justification” (Schwandt, 2001). As Charmaz (2006, p. 4) notes “every way of knowing rests on a theory of how people develop knowledge.” Epistemology therefore addresses questions of what knowledge is; how knowledge is best constructed and evaluated; what can be known; and what is the relationship between the knower and what can be known (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Carter and Little (2007, p. 1319) remark that “epistemology is inescapable” for the researcher, regardless of ontological orientation. They argue that a reflexive researcher actively adopts a specific epistemological stance. At the same time a less reflexive researcher

implicitly adopts a theory of knowledge, as engaging in knowledge creation requires, at the very least, tacit assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and its construction. According to Carter and Little (2007) these assumptions influence the conduct of research in at least three important ways. First, epistemology influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant in data collection and analysis. Second, epistemology is important in assessing the quality of data and analysis. Lastly, epistemology influences the form, voice, and representation of the research. That is, how the researcher communicates new knowledge from research findings to his or her audience.

As with ontology, epistemic positions can be set out on a continuum in parallel to ontological positions. That is to say a realist ontology is generally associated with an epistemological stance that emphasises the objective empirical analysis of concrete relationships in an external social world (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Knowledge is therefore considered to be that which specifies the “exact nature of laws, regularities, and relationships measured in terms of social facts” (p.493). In contrast, a relativist ontology is likely to be associated with a subjectivist epistemology that involves the researcher and research participants as active co-creators of knowledge. Knowledge is deemed to reside only within subjective experience, and cannot exist independently of the knower (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Knowledge is a creation of the mind, rather than a discovery of the mind.

In addition to ontological and epistemological assumptions, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) include axiological and methodological assumptions as two additional components of any research paradigm.

Axiology refers to the role of values, ethics and moral conduct of the researcher and how these influence the research process (Carter & Little, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researchers with a strong realist ontology and epistemology aim to generate knowledge which is generalisable and context-free, seeking out general and abstract laws that can be applied to wide array of phenomena, people, settings, and time (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The aim of the research inquiry centres on the explanation of a phenomenon through prediction and control. In seeking to establish a singular reality, they assume the position of

“disinterested scientist” by denying the influence of personal values and ethics on the process of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In strong contrast, researchers with a bent towards a relativist ontology and epistemology acknowledge that the research process is value-laden, and is therefore influenced by the value systems and cultural norms of the researcher and research participants. The primary aim of inquiry is directed at understanding and reconstruction. Creswell (2007) points out that all researchers bring their values to the research process. What differentiates most qualitative researchers, however, is their preference for making these values explicit by positioning themselves ‘within’ the study. This is achieved through self-reflective action and the acknowledgment and reporting of personal values and biases. Thus, as with epistemology, axiology influences the form, voice, and representation of the research; with the researcher’s ‘voice’ clearly evident in the text and narrative of a study.

Methodology deals with the most appropriate means of obtaining knowledge about the world, and addresses the questions of “How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). The choice of methodology is thus influenced by one’s ontological and epistemological beliefs and assumptions. Carter and Little (2007) emphasise that ‘methodology’ should not be confused with ‘research methods’, stating that methodology refers to the theory and analysis of how research should proceed (p. 1317). In contrast, research methods refer to the actual procedures, tools, and techniques used for gathering and analysing evidence. Crotty (1998) provides a useful definition of methodology, which he defines as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p. 3). To draw further distinction, a range of methodologies exist for qualitative research such as grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967); ethnography (Van Maanen, 2011); and case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). While the research process differs considerably for each of these methodologies, they share common research methods/practices such as interviews and observation.

In addition to ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions, Creswell (2007, p. 18) adds one final set of assumptions, namely rhetorical. He

argues that each research paradigm is associated with its own unique use and application of language and rhetoric, noting that qualitative researchers tend to favour writing in literary form through the use of metaphors, storytelling, and first-person language.

To summarise, a research paradigm, or what Crotty (1998) terms ‘theoretical perspective’, reflects the worldview of the researcher. This set of interrelated beliefs and assumptions shapes the research design and guides the research process throughout, informing the selection of participants, techniques and research methods. Buchanan and Bryman (2007), using the terms ‘paradigmatic diversity’ and ‘epistemological eclecticism’ draw attention to the fact that organisational research is no longer dominated by a single (positivist) research paradigm or epistemology. Rather, it is characterised by a range of positivist, constructivist, interpretivist, critical, and postmodern perspectives. The four major research paradigms, identified by Lincoln et al. (2011), which serve to influence and structure social science research, and in particular qualitative research, are outlined in the section that follows.

Major research paradigms in social science research

Positivism – stems from the natural sciences. It is rooted in a realist ontology which contends that an apprehensible external reality exists, independent of the researcher, which can be captured, studied and understood. Positivists view the world, both natural and social, as deterministic, objectively apprehensible, and consisting of one true reality. The aim of research conducted within the positivist paradigm is nomothetic. That is, it is concerned with the prediction and control of phenomena, and the production of general cause-effect laws that explain objective phenomena (Ponterotto, 2005). Such nomothetic laws are said to apply universally, transcending culture, context, time, and nation. These laws are used to predict the results of future experiments and behaviour, with the accumulation of knowledge being incremental.

Positivism is associated with an objectivist/dualist epistemology, which preferences the scientific method (hypothetico-deductive logic). It stresses deductive theory testing and

verification as the best means of generating knowledge about the world. Methodologically this implies knowledge is generated through experience of a phenomenon and the gathering of empirical evidence. This takes place in the form of strictly controlled experiments or quasi-experimental studies, using predominately inferential statistical methods designed to test and verify a priori hypotheses (Lincoln et al., 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). From an axiological perspective, positivism emphasises 'value-free inquiry', necessitating a separation between the researcher and the subject (dualism). Values, emotions, hopes, and expectations are deemed to have no place in scientific inquiry (Ponterotto, 2005), and are thus eliminated from, or strictly controlled for in, the research process. This is further reflected in the rhetorical structure used in presenting the results of research. Authorship positions the researcher as detached or neutral and findings are presented precisely, objectively, and 'scientifically' (Carter & Little, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005).

The criteria used for assessing rigour in the application of methods and the quality of knowledge generated in the positivist paradigm are summarised by Hudson and Ozanne (1988, p. 514) as follows:

- Establishment of a theoretical basis for the research through a discussion of previous research, clear definition of variables a priori, and specification of hypotheses a priori;
- Adherence to proper protocol in terms of the rules for sample selection, standardisation of research instruments across research settings, and antecedent and dependent variables;
- Demonstration of reliability, validity, generalisability and objectivity through adherence to a priori definitions and randomised sampling; and
- Demonstration of statistical significance of the data.

Postpositivism – departs from the positivist stance that reality is fully comprehensible. While this paradigm retains the notion that an objective reality exists, postpositivists assert that reality is only imperfectly comprehensible, and can never be examined totally free of the influence of the observer's standpoint. Postpositivists acknowledge that the prior knowledge, values, and beliefs of the researcher influence how

the world is observed and interpreted. The postpositivist position therefore retains an ontological realism while adopting a more relativist epistemological position (Maxwell, 2012b). This ontological-epistemological stance, termed “critical realism”, acknowledges that observations of the world are fallible and theories are therefore probabilistic at best. Stemming foremost from the work of philosopher Karl Popper, postpositivists substitute theory falsification for theory verification as the basis for knowledge generation. Popper (1959) reasoned that it is impossible to prove a general principle true in absolute terms regardless of the number of replications put forward in support of it, arguing that it requires only one instance at variance with the general principle to prove it false in absolute terms. Popper contends that theories which have survived every attempt at refutation should be considered only ‘provisionally true’ and scientific statements should therefore remain tentative and revisable forever.

Despite this difference in ‘knowing’, the goal of research in both the positivist and postpositivist research paradigms is the same “an explanation that leads ultimately to prediction and control of phenomena” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). As a consequence, the two paradigms share methodological and axiological similarities, with both paradigms favouring quantitative experimental/manipulative research methods, value-free inquiry, and a detached researcher role. The emphasis on theory falsification, rather than verification does, however, mean that postpositivists adopt modified experimental designs which emphasise triangulation of results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994a)

Critical theory – Guba and Lincoln (1994b, p. 109) use critical theory as a blanket term for a set of alternative research paradigms that include neo-Marxism, feminism, materialism, and participatory inquiry. Their argument for doing so is epistemological, in that all of these paradigms share the basic assumption of the value-laden nature of inquiry. From an ontological perspective critical theorists adopt a position of historical realism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994b). That is, an apprehensible reality is deemed to exist, but this reality is constructed within and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values. For the criticalist, truth and ‘reality’ are located within these historical values structures and are often manifest in different forms of hidden domination, coercion, or oppression. Therefore, the

main aim of research within this paradigm is the critique and changing of society and the emancipation of those without power. Research is undertaken not merely to understand and predict social phenomena, but also to bring about emancipatory change. Critical theorists highlight and critique different forms of domination and power asymmetry in society and organisation by critically examining existing theories and knowledge generation processes while maintaining a strong moral commitment to inclusion and shared decision making (Deetz, 2005). Research therefore aims to produce what Deetz (1996, p. 202) refers to as “dissensus” by challenging taken for granted realities, thereby providing a forum to aid the development of a more open consensus and to enable individuals to shift towards greater autonomy and self-definition.

Critical theorists approach the generation of knowledge from a transactional and subjectivist epistemology, whereby the researcher and research participant are inextricably linked through dialectical interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994a; Ponterotto, 2005). Far from the value-free mode of inquiry of the positivist and postpositivist paradigms, critical theory research is value-laden, with the researcher adopting the stance of advocate/activist imposing his or her values and pre-understanding on the inquiry. Assuming an authoritative role of ‘instigator’, the researcher actively challenges perceived ignorance and misapprehensions by way of dialectical interaction. Change is brought about when individuals are challenged to develop greater into their existing state of affairs, and importantly, to act upon this ‘enlightenment’ (Deetz, 1996). For the critical theorist knowing and understanding the world is insufficient, one must act in it to bring about change.

Interpretivism and constructivism are closely related, but distinct, paradigms that share the goal of understanding the complex and interconnected social world, from the perspective of those who live it. Schwandt (2000) provides a comprehensive summary of the epistemological and ontological differences between interpretivism and constructivism. While not ignoring or discounting the importance of these differences to philosophers and methodologists, they are often fine-grained, and of less concern to the pragmatic researcher. Accordingly, these paradigms are discussed here under the umbrella term of ‘interpretivism’. Interpretivism is considered an anti-realist stance that emerged in opposition to naïve realism

and growing efforts, particularly in North America, to apply positivist approaches from natural science to the study of the social world (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism is premised on the belief that the social world is fundamentally different to natural world and, therefore, must be studied differently (Lee, 1991). As such, it departs from both positivism and postpositivism through adherence to a relativist and idealist ontology, which rejects the notion of a single independent reality awaiting discovery by the researcher. As Charmaz and Bryant (2010) note, 'truth' is created rather than 'discovered'. Reality is deemed mental or perceived; a construction, or co-construction, of the mind (Lincoln et al., 2011), hence the plausible existence of multiple socially-constructed realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Ponterotto, 2005). Interpretivists contend that knowledge of reality cannot be separated from the person who is experiencing, or has experienced, it. This is because humans construct their own subjective and inter-subjective meaning as they interact with the world around them (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). This meaning is further bound by context and the situational and structural aspects of this context (Klenke, 2008). This represents the key ontological difference between positivism and postpositivism, and the interpretivist position.

The goal of interpretive inquiry is the generation of reconstructed understandings of the social world. This stems from interpretivism's German philosophical roots (*verstehen*) in hermeneutics and the belief that meaning is hidden and must be surfaced through deep reflection (Lee, 1991). Such reflection is stimulated by the interaction between the researcher and the research participant (Ponterotto, 2005). The epistemological foundations of interpretivism are therefore transactional and subjective, placing the researcher at the centre of the inquiry (Lincoln et al., 2011). Through interactive dialogue and interpretation the researcher and research participants (no longer referred to as 'subject' as in positivist research) co-construct a study's findings. Unlike positivist approaches, the goal of interpretive inquiry is not generalisation through the suppression of idiosyncrasies. Rather, research is approached from an idiographic perspective and thus focuses on understanding the individual as a unique, complex entity (Ponterotto, 2005). Research participants are not considered to be 'objects' as in the positivist paradigm, but as active sense makers much like the researcher (Deetz, 1996). Such an interactionist epistemology calls for research methods that allow for

close and sustained researcher-participant interaction. Lincoln et al. (2011, p. 184) refer to these as 'dialectical methodologies'.

Qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative analysis, ethnography and case study approaches, which ensconce the researcher in the day-to-day life of the research participants tend to dominate interpretive inquiry (Carter & Little, 2007). While the research methods deployed by each of these methodologies differ, they share similarities that distinguish them significantly from positivist and postpositivist methods. Purposive sampling replaces random sample. Sample size is determined not by statistical power requirements but by the nature, or emerging nature, of the inquiry. Data is collected directly from research participants through interviews, observation, or focus groups. Data is also collected indirectly through existing texts or images or through participant diaries or video journals. Data analysis also differs markedly. Statistical analysis is replaced by methods such as coding, comparative analysis, memo writing, discourse or narrative analysis, and thematic analysis (Carter & Little, 2007).

From an axiological perspective, the values and lived experience of the researcher have a significant bearing on the research process. Unlike positivists who deny any influence of personal values or beliefs, interpretivists aim to be transparent about their subjectivity and deliberately acknowledge value biases. They recognise that the adoption of an interactionist and subjective epistemology determines that their values and background will shape their interpretation, as well as the outcomes of the research. Interpretivists thus position themselves within the study as 'passionate participants', rather than as a 'disinterested scientists'. Lincoln et al. (2011) also contend that the researcher's values influence all aspects of the research process from the choice research problem, research paradigm, and theoretical framework to data gathering and analysis. Similarly the research participant plays an equally important role in shaping the inquiry and guiding the research process. This results in emerging research designs that allow the researcher to fully capture the participant's knowledge (Carter & Little, 2007).

Interpretivism's highly subjective stance creates epistemic and axiological tensions with positivistic paradigms, and raises questions as to the goodness or quality criteria by which research findings can be judged, and how one might go about demonstrating rigor in the research process and the validity of one's findings. This aspect represents perhaps the most contentious difference between research paradigms and continues to be debated amongst philosophers and methodologists (Lee, 1991; Lincoln et al., 2011; Tracy, 2010). Various forms of validity have been proffered such as authentic validity (fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, tactical authenticity) and ethical validity (Lincoln et al., 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 205) assert that ultimately all interpretive researchers should ask of themselves *"Are these findings sufficiently authentic . . . that I may trust myself in acting on their implications? More to the point, would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them?"* Hudson and Ozanne (1988, p. 515) provide a useful summary of the criteria that interpretive researchers can apply in addressing this question. These include determining whether the interpretation:

- Illuminates, discloses, and reveals the lived experience of participants;
- Rests on thickly contextualised, thickly described materials (commonly referred to as thick description);
- Is historically embedded and temporally grounded;
- Reflects the phenomena as a process that is relational and interactive;
- Incorporates prior understandings and interpretations as part of the final structural totality;
- Is coherent; and
- Produces understanding, that is, do all the elements coalesce into a meaningful whole?

Locating the present study - The choice of research paradigm, strategy, and methodology

The influence of research paradigm - As defined earlier in this chapter, a research paradigm represents the set of deeply held assumptions and beliefs of the researcher. In selecting an appropriate research design the researcher needs to ensure that it is congruent

both with the topic being investigated, as well as his or her own beliefs and values. In the section below I articulate my personal assumptions and how they served to influence the choice of research methodology adopted in this thesis.

Ontologically, I view the realist position that a single objective reality exists which is merely awaiting discovery by the researcher as problematic, at least with regard to the study of social phenomena. It is my belief that such a position undermines the role of context and leads to overly reductionist and normative accounts of complex social phenomena. This has been particularly true in the case of much of the turnover research, which has sought to portray the turnover process as a concrete and parsimonious structure. Turnover decisions are human enactments, and by our very nature humans are complex social beings. To assert that a single explanation of turnover decision making exists that can be applied to all individuals in all settings is not only inaccurate, but also dehumanising. In this regard, I am more comfortable with ontological position of 'critical realism' which asserts that, while an objective reality may well exist, it is imperfectly comprehensible and therefore all theories remain fallible and are at best probabilistic. That said, the interpretivist position that multiple social realities exist reflects most closely my own ontological beliefs about the nature of the social world we live in. Therefore, I adopt the epistemological stance that there are multiple ways of interpreting and theorising data, and that research should focus just as much on 'understanding' as it does on explanation of phenomena through prediction and control. Arguing that X is related to Y holds little value if one is unable to understand and explain the causal mechanism by which X influences Y, or fully grasp the meanings that participants attach to X or Y. I tend to agree with the argument offered by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) that "all research is interpretive" in that it is influenced by the researchers beliefs, values and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied, even if such beliefs are "invisible".

In terms of axiology and methodology, prioritising understanding over prediction requires a dialogic approach to research and close interaction between the researcher and research participants. Such an approach resonates strongly with my own personal preferences for conducting research and also certain strengths and interpersonal skills

inherent in my own personality. With respect to the present study, the Canterbury earthquake sequence is a context that I shared with my research participants and this enabled the formation of close and trusting relationships between myself as researcher and my participants. It also necessitates that I acknowledge the influence that my values, context, and subjective interpretations have on the research process.

The influence of the research aims - While the beliefs and values of the researcher are an important consideration in the choice of research design, ultimately it is the research purpose and aims that represent the primary influence (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). In this regard the overall purpose of this thesis, as stated in Chapter 1, is:

To produce a substantive theory of turnover decision making that is grounded in the post-crisis context following a significant extra-organisational shock. It aims to advance understanding of actual turnover decision-making processes by seeking out and interviewing leavers, that is, by considering the perspective of the leaver.

Chapter 2 sought, in part, to provide justification for this study by reviewing the extant turnover literature, and highlighting the key gaps in knowledge which remain. Further justification for this study's purpose and design, in particular the leaver-centric orientation of this thesis, can be found by examining the paradigmatic and methodological issues evident in turnover research to date. As highlighted throughout Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, research into voluntary turnover has long been dominated by a predictive agenda devoted to the goal of prediction and control of the turnover phenomenon, and the production of grand and generalisable theories which transcend situational contexts.

The high priority afforded to prediction, parsimony, and generality has had a substantial impact on the way in which turnover has been studied to date. Indeed Allen et al. (2013) provide strong evidence of the existence of a dominant analytic mindset (DAM) in turnover scholarship. Their analysis of 447 studies over a 52 year period reveals that the vast majority of turnover studies are characterised as “quantitative, conducted in field settings, at

the individual level of analysis, utilising correlational designs reliant on survey measures and regression-based methods” (2013, p. 76). Wholly qualitative studies made up less than 1 percent of the 447 studies reviewed. This suggests that positivist and postpositivist paradigms have been significant in shaping turnover research to date. In addition, Allen et al.’s analysis demonstrates that while organisational research in general has been shown to be largely multi-paradigmatic, turnover scholars have been less inclined to approach the topic from varied methodological stances. They argue that the DAM in turnover research, analogous to a physical dam, has constrained the conceptualisation of research questions and stymied ‘theoretical growth’, as any deviation from the methodological norms imposed by the DAM, or questioning of orthodoxy, is deemed illegitimate. Their analysis provides strong evidence to support Maertz and Griffeth’s (2004) assertion that rampant empirical work has not lead to significant theoretical development. In fact, Allen et al. (2013) observe that almost all of the major theoretical advancements in turnover scholarship, for example the Unfolding Model, have emanated from studies not employing the DAM. They propose that “turnover research which breaks from the DAM may be better positioned to provide novel insights into the field” (p. 65).

Allen et al.’s (2013) critique of turnover research methodology is compelling as it provides actual empirical evidence for the existence of a DAM. It is, however, by no means the first such critique. Over several decades numerous conceptual and meta-analytic reviews have highlighted methodological concerns in relation to the study of turnover, and in doing so have indirectly challenged the DAM and paradigmatic consensus evident in turnover research (Hom et al., 2017; Hom et al., 2012; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Mobley, 1977; Morrell & Arnold, 2007; Muchinsky & Tuttle, 1979; Peters & Sheridan, 1988; Russell, 2013; Steel, 2002).

The crux of the argument for those who have challenged the DAM, in particular Morrell and Arnold (2007) and Steel (2002), is that turnover decisions are inherently complex human enactments and that cross-sectional or static cohort designs utilising survey measures of independent variables fail to fully capture this complexity. Buchanan and Bryman (2007) assert that research produced in this manner fails to provide much evidence of clear causal

links. They suggest that part of the reason for this lies in the fact that phenomena such as turnover decision making are multivariate and multi-layered, and that the constructs that we employ as scientists (for example job satisfaction, job embeddedness, or organisational commitment) mean different things to different stakeholders and in different contexts; yet we employ them as if they are constants, free from context. Morgan and Smircich (1980) argued much earlier that static or cross-sectional methods are most often inappropriate for studying the social world as they “reduce the role of human beings to elements subject to the influence of a more or less deterministic set of forces.... which for the sake of accurate definition and measurement, have to be abstracted from their context.” (p. 498).

Morrell and Arnold (2007) suggest that turnover decisions exhibit at least three forms of complexity. First, they are *ontologically complex* in the sense that the point of actual decision is often difficult to ‘pin down’ in exact time or place. This is problematic for cross-sectional research designs where the actual reason for a particular quit may only arise after the first (and oftentimes only) wave of survey data collection. Turnover decisions also exhibit *dynamic complexity* in the sense that they unfold or take place at varying speeds; sometimes very quickly following a shock, or alternatively, over a long period of time following accumulated dissatisfaction. Both of these scenarios are problematic for cross-sectional designs. Lastly, turnover decisions exhibit *social complexity* in that they are unique to an individual, and influenced by such factors as emotion, imagination and memories. Morrell and Arnold (2007) argue that extant turnover research relies on a level of abstraction that bypasses all three forms of complexity. They stress that relying on closed item scale measures of ‘stable constructs’ limits one’s ability to understand how turnover decisions are socially constructed and contextually influenced. Consequentially, as highlighted in Chapter 2, existing turnover theories have been limited in their ability to explain much variance in turnover or attend to actual reasons for, and decision processes involved in, leaving. By not considering how contextual influences might shape turnover decision making, current theories struggle to explain anomalous accounts of this organisational phenomena.

This thesis seeks to address these limitations by providing a richer and more nuanced understanding of actual turnover decision-making processes, while attending to context. Such

aims necessitate an alternative approach to the study of turnover decision making, requiring a shift in purpose, from prediction to understanding, and a deliberate departure from the dominant analytical mindset and paradigmatic consensus that has shaped turnover research thus far. Whereas the DAM advocates controlling for context in order to produce generalisable theories, the alternative deliberately attends to context. Ontologically this involves acknowledgement of the existence of a multiplicity of perspectives and truths, which in turn will allow for the development of turnover theory that is more reflective of the context in which leavers are situated (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2008). Such an approach produces substantive, rather than formal or grand generalisable theory. Glaser (2007) differentiates between formal and substantive theory, stating that the former operates at a high level of generality while the latter “offers a theoretical interpretation or explanation of a delimited problem in a particular area and within a given context” (p. 101). While such theories are limited in terms of their generalizability, they are potentially more meaningful for managers attempting to understand and control turnover within a given context; in the case of this thesis the post-crisis context.

A departure from the DAM also requires a shift in epistemological and methodological assumptions. Where the DAM advocates that the investigator and ‘object’ be separated and treated as independent entities, the alternative requires a leaver-centric approach to the study of turnover and close dialogue and interaction between the researcher and individual leavers. Such a dialogic approach enables the researcher to seek out and interpret the reasons, processes and meaning that individuals ascribe to their decision to leave. A shortcoming of such an approach is that it is necessarily retrospective. That is, one can only interview leavers once they have left an organisation. Therefore any account of leaving is a reconstruction of reality, not a perfect rendering of an objective reality of what precisely happens at the point of making a decision to leave or in the time leading up to the decision. Retrospective accounts of leaving are therefore susceptible to memory biases such as forgetting or retrospective rationality (Lee et al., 1996; Maertz & Campion, 2004). Such limitations are, however, inescapable if one is to attempt to address the ontological, dynamic and social complexity inherent in turnover decisions which were alluded to earlier in this chapter. An interpretivist epistemological stance acknowledges the influence that both

researcher and participants have on shaping the findings of a study and the fact that findings represent a co-constructed interpretation of reality, not an objective, definitive rendering of it.

The choice of research design – Taking into account the research aims of this thesis, as well as my own personal ontological and epistemological assumptions as a researcher, an interpretive approach to the present study was deemed most appropriate. As discussed earlier in this chapter, research strategies associated with an interpretive paradigm are more naturalistic, inductive and dialectical in nature and, therefore most often associated with qualitative research designs.

Qualitative research in the field of voluntary turnover is uncommon and far from being the norm or a preferred methodology, particularly among organisational and vocational psychologists (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999). In fact, Allen et al.'s (2013) analysis found that less than three percent of the 447 studies utilised a qualitative component of any form in their research design. Yet, in concluding their paper, they appeal to turnover scholars to consider employing qualitative research strategies. They argue that the adoption of qualitative strategies will enable researchers to “uncover nuances in the turnover process that cannot be discovered through using the DAM” (p. 78); or as Pope and Mays (2008) state “reach the parts that other methods cannot”. Creswell (2007) notes that qualitative research methods are most appropriate when researchers seek to understand the context in which participants address a problem or issue; or where partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations; or where these theories fail to capture the complexity of the problem being examined. Gephart (2004) adds that qualitative research provides memorable examples of important management issues and concepts and, in doing so, has the potential to ‘rehumanise’ research and theory; something that is sorely needed in turnover research.

The following quote from Corbin and Strauss (2008) perhaps sums up best the alignment between my personal beliefs as a researcher, the opportunities I see within turnover research, and my reasons for adopting a qualitative approach to this study:

“There are many reasons for choosing to do qualitative research, but perhaps the most important is the desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge.” (p. 16)

Although numerous definitions of what constitutes qualitative research exist (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), Van Maanen (1979, p. 521) notes that qualitative research is best thought of, not as a single method, but as a “label or an umbrella term” for array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and come to terms with the meaning, not frequency, of naturally occurring social phenomena. Despite qualitative research’s multi-paradigmatic, and sometimes contested ontological and epistemological underpinnings, there are several defining attributes which most scholars tend to agree upon. These attributes include:

- First, qualitative research is inductive and interpretive and occurs in natural settings, not in laboratories or strictly-controlled experimental conditions. Qualitative analysis involves interpretation, therefore it is well suited to understanding the world from the perspective of the participants being studied, and for examining and articulating process (Maxwell, 2012a; Pratt, 2009). Qualitative researchers attempt to address the ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions of human behaviour and identify how participants come to understand, account for, take action and manage their lives in a given situation (Van Maanen, 1979). The focus is therefore on describing and understanding actual human interactions, meanings and decision processes which constitute ‘real-life’ organisational settings (Gephart, 2004). As such qualitative research is well-suited for addressing the research aims of this thesis, which focus on how turnover decisions actually get made in a particular setting.
- Second, and associated with the first point, qualitative research is flexible (i.e. emergent or dynamic) allowing for research strategies to be adapted to match the demands of a given research situation (Charmaz, 2010; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999). As Gephart (2004) notes, qualitative research is often designed at the same time it is being done,

and remains open to unanticipated events and outcomes. This implies that qualitative researchers examine phenomena without making advance judgements of what the results may be (Williams et al., 1998). They move back and forth between data collection, data analysis and emergent theory (Maxwell, 2012a). Non-random, purposeful or theoretical sampling are utilised as part of a flexible research design.

- Third, qualitative data derive from the participants' perspective and are generally a product or co-construction of human interaction. As a result qualitative data tends to take the form of words and text rather than numerical data, and analyses of data is textual rather than numerical or statistical (Carter & Little, 2007). The aim of qualitative analysis is to produce a thick and detailed description of participants' meanings in situ social processes (Gephart, 2004).
- Fourth, qualitative researchers aim to explain research observations by providing well-substantiated conceptual insights that illuminate how broad concepts and theories operate in specific contexts (Gephart, 2004). Qualitative researchers aim to provide a 'holistic' overview of the context being studied.
- Lastly, qualitative research does not refer to one specific research method or set of practices, nor does it privilege one method over another. Rather, qualitative research refers to an approach to research that encompasses a "broad range of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Deciding between these various research strategies is a crucial step in the research process, and is discussed more fully below.

The choice of research strategy – In addition to deciding between a quantitative or qualitative approach to the study, one must also decide upon the most appropriate strategy of inquiry, which Creswell (2007, p. 11) defines as "the types of qualitative (and quantitative) methods, designs or models that provide specific direction for procedures in a research study". He adds that the terms 'strategy of inquiry', 'research strategy', and 'research

methodology' are used interchangeably. The strategy of inquiry in turn provides guidance on the research methods (procedures, tools, and techniques) employed in gathering and analysing data (Carter & Little, 2007). Under the 'umbrella' of qualitative research, several distinct research strategies exist. These include, among others, various forms of ethnography, case study, grounded theory, narrative analysis, action research, and phenomenology. In selecting the most appropriate research strategy for this thesis consideration was given to all of the above research strategies. Taking into account the interpretive nature of the study and its aims, which focus specifically on process and context, grounded theory was deemed most appropriate.

Grounded theory methodology (GTM) is a method of theory construction and qualitative analysis in which researchers systematically and inductively develop theory from data. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) describe GTM as an inductive, iterative, interactive and comparative methodology whereby researchers build theory by moving back and forth between data collection and analysis. The choice of GTM for this thesis was based in part on its popularity and growing acceptance as a method of choice amongst qualitative researchers (Hood, 2007). Moreover, GTM was deemed appropriate because of its ability to generate both formal and substantive theory, given this thesis aims to generate a substantive theory of turnover decision making grounded within the contextual boundaries of a post-crisis situation. Furthermore, GTM's ability to generate theory that is not abstracted from, but rather grounded in, the empirical reality facing the participants makes it well-suited to the leaver-centric approach to studying turnover adopted in this thesis. Lastly, the method's ability to attend to and elucidate complex social processes, such as turnover decision making, make it well-suited to meet the objectives of the study.

GTM was originated by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss. Details of the method were first published in their 1967 book "The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research", which followed their studies of death and dying in hospitals. At the time quantitative methods dominated social science research. Glaser and Strauss were frustrated by the dominance of empiricism and positivism in the social sciences and the inability of prevailing methods to produce new theory (a situation not too dissimilar to that

currently experienced in turnover scholarship). In publishing the details of their method, Glaser and Strauss sought to systemise, and thereby legitimise, the use of inductive qualitative theorising (Charmaz, 2014). In stark contrast to the positivistic methods of the day, they advocated developing theory from research grounded in data, rather than testing logically deduced hypotheses from existing grand theories. Glaser and Strauss were of the opinion that to truly understand human behaviour, one had to talk to people and listen to their explanations for the underlying what and why (Stern & Porr, 2011). Their book offered a systematic and rigorous method of qualitative analysis, the defining components of which are summarised by Charmaz (2014, pp. 7-8):

- Simultaneous data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytical codes and categories from data, not pre-existing theory
- Using the constant comparison method during each stage of the analysis
- Advancing theory during each stage of data collection and analysis
- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories and identify gaps
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not population representativeness
- Conducting the literature review after developing independent analysis

Nearly 50 years on from the original publication of the method, broad consensus exists as to the basic canons and procedures of GTM. That said, Glaser and Strauss' (1967) invitation to scholars to "use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way" did not go unanswered. As a result several variants of GTM exist today, most notably 'emergent grounded theory' (Glaser, 1992), 'systematic grounded theory' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); and 'constructivist grounded theory' (Charmaz, 2014). The variations in application of the original grounded theory method stem, in part, from the differing epistemological and ontological beliefs of its originators and the quite public and acrimonious falling out between Glaser and Strauss.

Glaser maintained (and continues to maintain) that the method is one of emergence in which theory rises directly and rigorously out of the data, is returned to the data for

validation, and emerges victoriously devoid of interpretivism (Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004). Although Glaser argues that GTM should be viewed as ontologically and epistemologically neutral, his stance on the method suggests an objectivist leaning and a strong conviction that truth/reality resides in the data awaiting discovery and understanding. Glaser (1998) remains adamant that the researcher should never “force meaning on a participant, but rather.... listen to his genuine meanings, to grasp his perspectives, to study his concerns and in so doing combat impressionistic influences by tying theory to data over and over again” (p. 32). He contends that grounded theory is a ‘general method’ suitable for all research problems and all forms of data. As such he advises researchers to approach a study without any preconceived theoretical lenses and to not formulate specific research questions prior to commencing data collection. Equally, researchers should abstain from conducting a review of the literature until very late in the analysis, and only once the ‘core category’ has emerged and the emergent theory is sufficiently developed. The final grounded theory emerges through a process of ‘refitting and refining’ of categories which integrate around the core category. Glaser’s version of GTM has come to be referred to as ‘traditional or classical grounded theory’ and also ‘Glaserian grounded theory’.

While Glaser (1992) advocated strict adherence to an emergence model of theory generation; Strauss (1987), and later Strauss and Corbin (1990), proffered a reformulation of the classic grounded theory method. In seeking to provide detailed guidance on the method, particularly to novice researchers, Strauss and Corbin proposed a more systematic approach to grounded theory analysis. Their approach was deeply rooted in Strauss’ pragmatist and interactionist epistemology, hence the aim of making the method more ‘user-friendly’ and systematic (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Kelle, 2007). Strauss and Corbin provided detailed analytical and coding procedures and a specific theoretical framework for understanding basic human interaction. Theory constructed under the control of this framework results in a linear model which identifies the causes, conditions, and consequences that explain the phenomenon, context, actions and interactions. While acknowledging Glaser’s assertion that theory should be allowed to emerge from data, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that detailed analytical procedures are necessary to provide a degree of standardisation and rigour to the process (p. 13). Glaser (1992) protested that this forces data into preconceived

theoretical categories, and represents rigidity never intended for the grounded theory method.

The use of a preconceived theoretical lens to shape analysis represents the most significant difference between classical grounded theory and systematic grounded theory (what Glaser, 1992 referred to as emergence versus forcing). Additional differences relate to the use of literature and the formulation of research questions prior to commencing data collection. While acknowledging the importance of emergence in GTM, Strauss and Corbin caution against 'naïve induction'. They suggest that specific reading of the literature, and understanding from past experiences, may be useful in stimulating theoretical sensitivity and developing initial research and interview questions; and that such research questions should identify the phenomenon to be studied and what is known about the subject (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Heath & Cowley, 2004). Strauss and Corbin also introduced additional coding procedures not in the original statement of the method, most notably axial coding and the use of the conditional/consequential matrix, which forces the research to consider important contextual issues in relation to the phenomenon under study.

Goulding (2001) in summarising the differences between the two approaches to GTM, notes that each has its potential benefits and pitfalls. Similarly, each version of GTM has its adherents and proponents (verging on fanaticism at times in Glaser's case) to who these methodological differences remain of significant import. Of greater concern to Bryant (2002, 2003), however, is not so much methodological differences, but rather the apparent failing of either of GTM's originators to move the method beyond its positivistic roots. Of particular concern to Bryant is the emphasis that classical GTM places on discovering theory from data that exists separately from the researcher; that is 'an objective reality'. This approach places the researcher 'outside' of the research process. This stance is at odds with the more contemporary philosophical and epistemological landscape; in particular interpretive and constructivist research paradigms, which view the researcher, and research participants, as active in the creation and interpretation of knowledge. In this regard Mills et al. (2008) liken the evolution of GTM to shifts taking place on an epistemological spiral beginning with classical GTM, rooted in positivist assumptions, and the latter end of the spiral "actively

repositioning the researcher as the author of a reconstruction of experience and meaning". Indeed, in the case of Strauss and Corbin they have evolved GTM along this spiral towards a more interpretive position and relativist ontology. This is evidenced in Juliet Corbin's articulation of the ontological assumptions underpinning the most recent statement of the method. She declares that "there is no one 'reality' out there" and agrees with key constructivist assumptions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 9-11). More contemporary reformulations of GTM have sought to reposition the methodology (or in the words of Bryant "reground") further along Mills et al.'s (2008) epistemological spiral. Most notable in this regard is Charmaz's (2000, 2006, 2014) constructivist grounded theory.

In an effort to realign GTM with interpretive and constructivist theoretical perspectives, Charmaz (2000) proffered her version of GTM. In doing so Charmaz clearly articulated her relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. Unlike Glaser and Strass, Charmaz (2006) argues that "neither data nor theories are discovered" (p. 10). Rather, the researcher is part of the world being studied and the data collected. She goes on to state (p. 130) that "the [grounded] theory depends on the researcher's view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it". Madill, Jordan, and Shirley's (2000) fascinating study of coding practice bears testament to this fact. Their study provided strong evidence that a researcher's beliefs and experience exert considerable influence on the qualitative data analysis process and subsequent theory generation. Charmaz asserts that grounded theories are constructed through involvement and interaction with research participants, their perspectives and contexts.

The main difference between constructivist GTM and early approaches lies in what constitutes data. For Charmaz data does not exist in isolation from the researcher, rather it is co-produced by the researcher and research participants. Although remaining true to the basic tenets of GTM, Charmaz's approach provides clear guidance on the treatment and analysis of data. She advises researchers to immerse themselves in the data in such a way to ensure that the narrative of participants is embedded in the final grounded theory, utilising a writing style that is more literary than scientific thereby evoking the experience of participants (Mills et al., 2008). This reinforces the emic position of the constructivist i.e. that of an 'insider' immersed in the situation, which allows for the development of theoretical

density and thick description (McCann and Clarke, 2003: 10). That said, any theoretical account produced using a constructivist approach to GTM offers a situated and interpretive portrayal of the world studied, not a precise rendering of it. By implication then constructivist GTM is different not only in approach to the method, but also in the theory it produces. Constructivist grounded theories represent tentative generalisations, which are limited to the substantive area of study, not universal statements. The researcher offers an interpretation of the phenomenon under study and not an ultimate proclamation of truth, a representation of reality, not a replication of reality (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, pp. 51-52). As Heath and Cowley (2004, p. 149) remark grounded theory does not produce “the theory, but a theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation” (original emphasis).

In deciding upon a specific approach to grounded theory for this thesis I found aspects of each of the three main approaches appealing. Glaser’s emphasis on emergence and the primacy of data; as well as his recommendation to abstain from engaging with existing literature and theory, is appealing given the aims of this thesis to advance turnover research beyond existing theory. Strauss and Corbin’s approach, with its specific focus on causes, conditions, and consequences, provides a useful framework for understanding turnover decision-making processes. In particular, their conditional-consequential matrix provides a useful analytic framework with which to examine contextual influences on turnover decision making, and identify nuances in the process. Additionally, their provision of clear coding and analytical guidelines were appealing to me as a novice grounded theory researcher. Corbin and Strauss’ latest statement of their method (2008) also has strong interpretive underpinnings, which resonate strongly with my own beliefs and assumptions as a researcher. Charmaz’s constructivist approach to the method was appealing as it aligns most closely to my personal ontological and epistemological orientation. The emphasis Charmaz places on understanding the meanings which participants attribute to their actions is appealing given the leaver-centric nature of this thesis. Further, Charmaz’s acknowledgment of the role that the researcher exerts on the research process, and the final theory produced, is particularly relevant given the context of this thesis, in which I share a common context with my research participants.

The choice of a specific approach to grounded theory was thus one that I agonised over for some time. However, upon reading the more contemporary writings on the method, in particular the work of Bryant and Charmaz (2007); Charmaz (2014); Stern (2007); Stern and Porr (2011); Suddaby (2006); Corbin and Strauss (2008) and even Glaser (1998), I came to realise that what matters most is not whether the researcher follows unfailingly a particular approach to GTM, but rather that they adhere to the central tenets of the method and adapt them in a manner which is consistent with their own ontological and epistemological beliefs. I found the following two statements particularly compelling and reassuring. First, Heath and Cowley (2004, p. 149) reiterate Glaser's (1998) assertion that researchers should 'stop talking about grounded theory and get on with doing it'; they state:

"The researcher should set aside anxiety about 'doing it right' and rather ensure that they adhere to the basic tenets of the method".

Second, Stern and Porr (2009:14) state:

"The beauty of GT is that while you must align with key tenets, you are not beholden to methodological dogma. You can tailor aspects of your approach to fit unique research contexts and particular scientific pursuits without sacrificing methodological integrity".

In heeding this advice, my approach to GTM is framed through an interpretivist lens. As a result I drew extensively on the writings of Charmaz (2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) to guide my use of the method. Notwithstanding my paradigmatic location, I was guided by, and sought to adhere to, the key tenets and basic process of GTM throughout the study. These are outlined below, with full explanation of how the process was operationalised in this thesis outlined in Chapter 4 which follows.

Charmaz (2006) describes the grounded theory process as taking place in a linear form, although in reality the process is far more recursive and iterative. The point of departure for a grounded theory study is the articulation of a broad research problem or question, rather than a statement of specific hypotheses to be tested. Unlike deductive methods, and some

inductive methods, the analytical process begins when the first piece of data is collected and continues until all theoretical categories are fully specified in terms of their properties and dimensions, and the collection of additional data yields no further theoretical insight about the emerging grounded theory; a point referred to as theoretical saturation. The core analytical processes which enable the researcher to move from broad research question to final grounded theory are discussed in detail below¹.

- ***Simultaneous data collection and analysis.***

Glaser (1978) is well known for his maxim “all is data”. In GTM studies data have primacy and gathering rich data is essential to developing meaningful theory. Intensive interviewing represents the primary data collection method for most GTM studies, although this is often accompanied by data obtained through observation, field work, extant texts or documents, and even survey data. Charmaz (2006) argues that intensive interviewing fits particularly well with GTM in that it provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience. Interviews, particularly unstructured or semi-structured, afford the researcher the flexibility required by GTM.

It is, however, not so much the type of data that distinguishes GTM from other qualitative methods, but rather how it is collected. Unlike other more structured qualitative methods, where identical questions are posed to all participants and analysis is delayed until all interviews are completed and transcribed, GTM does not separate data collection and analysis. Rather, the two steps take place concurrently. Stern and Porr (2011, p. 44) liken the process to a “matrix operation, where everything is going at once”. Charmaz (2006) advises researchers to initially develop only a few broad, open-ended questions with which to commence data collection. Once the first piece of data

¹ Conducting the literature review after developing independent analysis is one of the central tenets of GTM. This aspect has been discussed in detail at the start of Chapter 2 and in earlier sections of this chapter; hence it is not discussed further here.

is collected the analytical process commences, thereby enabling the researcher to include all seemingly relevant issues, or tentative theories, into subsequent interviews and observations, and in so doing capture potentially relevant aspects as soon as they are perceived (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Interview questions are therefore adapted based on what arises in the emergent theory.

Such focused data collection enables the researcher to test and sharpen ideas in a recursive analytical process. Concepts which emerge in the early stages of analysis are considered provisional and must 'earn' their way into the final theory by being repeatedly present (or notably absent) in subsequent interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 419-420). This further requires that GTM researchers adopt a unique approach to sampling.

- ***Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not population representativeness.***
Sampling in grounded theory is a sequential process which proceeds on theoretical grounds (i.e. in terms of emergent concepts, their properties, dimensions and variations, rather than predetermined population characteristics). As discussed above, the initial broad research question(s) informs the starting point for data collection. Thus at the commencement of a GTM study the researcher selects a group of individuals or an organisation that is representative of the phenomenon being studied. Initial sampling is therefore akin to selective or purposeful sampling used in other qualitative methods. However, because data collection and analysis take place concurrently in GTM studies, determining what data to collect next and where to find them is governed by the emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process is referred to as theoretical sampling. As the researcher analyses the data, gaps become evident which require further data collection in order to illuminate, extend or refine the emergent theory. This requires the researcher to constantly redirect sample selection and make strategic decisions as to which participants are likely to provide the most information-rich data to meet emergent analytical needs (Goulding, 2002). It is partly through the process of theoretical sampling that representativeness and consistency are achieved. Corbin and Strauss (1990) stress, however, that it is the representativeness of concepts,

not of persons, that matters in GTM sampling. It is therefore not possible to determine the optimal sample size at the start of a GTM study, and the quality of the final theory produced is in no way a function of the sample size obtained (Cutcliffe, 2000). Stern (2007) warns that it may in fact be defeating to attempt to collect too much data, as files go unanalysed and the researcher becomes overwhelmed.

Sampling for the purpose of conceptual refinement requires that the researcher remains open to adapting interview protocols and questions; changing research sites or participants; following up on recurring patterns; and asking participants to provide additional information on categories that seem central to the emerging theory (Draucker, Martsof, Ross, & Rusk, 2007b).

- ***Constructing analytical codes and categories from data, not pre-existing theory.***

In building theory from data GTM researchers work with their conceptualisations of data, not the actual data per se. As such concepts form the foundation of analysis and the basic ‘building blocks’ of grounded theories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Concepts which are shown to relate to the same phenomenon are grouped to form theoretical categories. These, however, are not merely thematic headings. Theoretical categories are higher level, more abstract concepts, than those they represent. These core theoretical categories serve as the “cornerstones of the developing theory, that is they provide the means by which a theory is integrated” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 420).

With concepts being the ‘basic unit of analysis’, the analytical process involves conceptualising the meaning of data by assigning concept codes to represent what is being expressed or indicated by the data; a process known as coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A code is an “essence-capturing” word or short phrase that simultaneously categorises, summarises and accounts for the data it represents (Saldaña, 2012). While coding can take many forms, [for example Corbin and Strauss (2008) distinguish between open, axial and selective coding; and Charmaz (2006) distinguishes between initial and focused coding] the basic process remains the same and involves ‘breaking down’ the data, conceptualising it at a more abstract level, and

‘putting the data back together’ in different ways. Coding is very much an inductive process that involves thinking abstractly; it is a conceptual activity not a mechanical one. Although codes are derived from the data, they represent the analyst’s interpretation of what the data is describing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Open or initial coding is often done on a line-by-line basis and begins with the researcher asking ‘analytical questions’ of the data, such as “What is the data a study of?”; “What do the data suggest?”; “From who’s point of view?”; “Which theoretical categories might these statements indicate?” and “When, how, and with what consequences are people acting?” (Charmaz, 2012). Unlike other qualitative methods, where coding for themes or topics is common, Charmaz (2010) advises GTM researchers to code for action and theoretical potential and, where possible, codes should take the form of gerunds (i.e. the noun form of verbs) as this enables one to more readily identify process in the data. Coding in gerunds also enables the researcher to more readily identify emergent links between processes in the data.

Once the most salient or frequent codes have been identified, the coding process becomes more focussed and selective. Selective coding allows the researcher to synthesise and sort large amounts of data, and evaluate which codes best explain or interpret the empirical phenomenon (Charmaz, 2010). In order to earn their way into the final theory selective codes are tested or compared against data, other codes, and tentative theoretical ideas. Only codes which “carry the weight of the analysis” (Charmaz, 2010, p. 164) are elevated to tentative theoretical categories. Initial codes, selective codes and theoretical categories are continuously and iteratively analysed through the use of memo writing and constant comparison, discussed below.

- ***Using the constant comparison method during each stage of analysis.***

The analytic process in GTM studies is one of comparison at all levels of analysis. Reduction in the complexity of data is achieved by conceptualising what they appear to have in common (Rennie, 1998). This requires that researchers compare data with data, data with codes, codes with codes, codes with categories, categories with categories,

and their finished analysis with relevant theory and literatures (Charmaz, 2012). Incidents or codes that are found to be conceptually similar are grouped together under a higher-level descriptive concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparison, combined with memoing, allows the researcher to identify and elaborate the properties and dimensions of emergent concepts (Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002), and account for patterns and variations in the data. Constant comparison ensures greater precision (the grouping of like and only like phenomena) and consistency (always grouping like with like) of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Additionally, it assists the researcher in guarding against potential bias by constantly comparing and challenging emerging ideas with data.

In this way GTM is not only a method of induction, but also abduction and verification (Rennie, 1998). The constant comparison process requires that tentative ideas and hypotheses about the structure of, and relationships between, categories are developed and verified as much as possible during the research process. Additional negative or qualifying evidence from the field is then used to further validate the plausibility of the category, structure or theory. This process continues until the addition of new data adds no further meaning and requires no further categorisation, i.e. the categories are saturated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In this way the emerging theory is advanced at each stage of data collection and analysis, another of the core tenets of GTM.

- ***Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories and identify gaps.***

Memoing serves as an intermediate stage between data collection and writing of the final paper or thesis (Charmaz, 2010). Saldaña (2012) argues that while initial coding is an important part of the analytical process, codes merely represent a 'trigger' for deeper reflection and thinking that takes place through memo writing. Stern and Porr (2011) liken memoing to the 'mortar' that brings the building blocks of theory (codes and categories) together. Memoing and coding therefore take place concurrently with

memoing commencing with the first coding session and continuing to the very end of the research process.

Analytical memos provide a structured means to keep track of all the categories, properties, conceptual relationships, hypotheses, and generative questions that evolve from the analytical process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Memoing is fundamental to the formulation of theory and its revision throughout the research process. Memos help the researcher develop ideas, analyse codes, take them apart and build them up. They provide the means to compare data, explore ideas and direct further data gathering (Charmaz, 2006:12).

Memoing facilitates the interplay between the researcher and their data. That is, memos enable researchers to immerse themselves in their data, explore the meanings that data evoke, thereby providing direction and impetus for further data collection and coding. Lempert (2007, p. 247) describes memos as “the analytical locations where the researchers are most fully present”. Writing analytical memos helps, from the outset, to clarify thinking on the research topic and capture any assumptions or inferences made during the analysis. Memos represent the narrated record of the researcher’s thinking or ‘conversations with themselves’ during analysis, which can at a later stage be reviewed, verified, modified, or critiqued (Birks & Mills, 2011; Lempert, 2007; Saldaña, 2012). Memo writing therefore introduces reflexivity to the analysis by providing researchers with a means to articulate, and reflect upon, how their own subjectivity might impact on the collection and analysis of the data. While memo writing need not follow a particular formula or structure, Saldaña (2012), offers some suggestions as to what it is the researcher should reflect on. This includes reflecting upon how you personally relate to the participant’s experience; the study’s research questions; your coding choices and operational definitions for codes; emergent patterns, categories or themes; possible interrelationships between categories; the emergent or a related existing theory; and problems or ethical issues with the study.

- ***Theoretical integration through memo sorting, integration and diagramming***

The final product of a grounded theory study is an integrated and comprehensive theory that explains a process or scheme associated with a phenomenon (Birks & Mills, 2011). The key to achieving this is the theoretical sorting of memos, although the means for doing so differs somewhat across the different versions of GTM. Glaser (1978) argues that the integration of the final theory should take place around the emergent 'core category', whereas Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that theoretical integration should take place under a specified framework of causes, conditions and consequences. Specifics aside, the basic process of memo sorting entails physically sorting memos, conceptual categories, and codes; and then resorting, regrouping and reorganising them in order to present a plausible theoretical explanation and set of propositions as to how conceptual categories are linked (Stern & Porr, 2011). Memo sorting enables the researcher to identify any gaps in the emergent theory as it considers how categories 'fit' together (Charmaz, 2006). Sorting introduces variation into the analysis by also considering those categories that do not seem to fit (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A useful tool to aid memo sorting is the use of diagrams to provide a visual representation of categories, their properties and dimensions, and the relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006). Diagrams and carefully sorted and selected memos then form the basis upon which the final grounded theory is based. Writing up the theory is the final step in any GTM study.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter set out to articulate the rationale for adopting a qualitative and learner-centric approach to the study of voluntary turnover decision making, arguing that such an approach would address several shortcomings in existing turnover research. In deciding upon grounded theory as an appropriate research methodology due consideration was given to the aims of the thesis as well as the ontological, epistemological and axiological beliefs of the author. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the key tenets of GTM. Chapter 4, which follows, discusses in detail how these key tenets were operationalised in terms of collecting and analysing data for the thesis.

CHAPTER 4

Data Collection and Analysis

INTRODUCTION

“...When I review a paper containing a claim of grounded theory, I check to ensure that, at a minimum, the authors have described their methodology transparently enough to reassure me that they followed core analytic tenets of the method...”

Suddaby (2006, p. 640)

The preceding chapter outlined the rationale for adopting a grounded theory method (GTM), and concluded with a description of the central tenets of GTM. This chapter discusses in detail how the specific GTM methods were implemented in order generate and analyse data for this thesis. The chapter commences with a brief discussion of the post-crisis research context and how this influenced the timing of the study and the initial selection of research participants. The sampling strategy and data collection procedures used are then discussed in detail. Data analysis is discussed in terms of coding, memoing, constant comparison and diagramming. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the criteria used to ensure rigor in the implementation of the method.

POST-CRISIS TURNOVER RESEARCH: THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT

As discussed in earlier chapters, this thesis aims to produce a substantive theory of turnover decision making that is grounded in the post-crisis context following a significant extra-organisational shock. It aims to advance understanding of how such shocks influence turnover decision-making processes by seeking out and interviewing actual job leavers. The rationale for focussing on the post-crisis context was articulated in Chapter 1, however, it is necessary to discuss here how the specific context of the Christchurch earthquakes influenced the design of the present study.

Apart from the tragic loss of 185 lives, the September 2010 and February 2011 earthquakes (and subsequent aftershocks which continued well into 2013) had a significant

impact on both organisations and individuals in the Canterbury region². Large-scale devastation of the central business district (CBD) of Christchurch meant that most inner-city businesses had to relocate their operations either temporarily or permanently (50 per cent of the buildings in the CBD were severely damaged, and nearly 1,000 buildings needed demolition). Over 3,000 businesses in the CBD, along with their 50,000 employees were either permanently or temporarily displaced. Nearly a third of CBD businesses were unable to operate in the immediate six month period following the February 2011 earthquake. Key infrastructure around the region was also significantly damaged interrupting water and sewerage, power supply, roading, public transport, and educational systems. Some examples include the need to rebuild 895km of roads; damage sustained to 124km of water mains and 300km of sewer pipes, resulting in 30,000 chemical toilets being distributed to households; the partial or whole relocation of 12 schools, resulting in 55 per cent of secondary students sharing a school; and damage to recreational facilities across the city, most notably AMI Sports Stadium.

Over 100,000 residential houses were damaged and required repair or rebuild, 7,000 of these homes required complete demolition and the land upon which the property stood was 'red zoned'³. An estimated 400,000 insurance claims were lodged with the Earthquake Commission⁴ (EQC). By the end of 2014 between 93 and 99 per cent of these claims had been settled, however, the rebuilding and repair of homes and other infrastructure continues to this day. As a result of damage to residential dwellings many families had to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently, with over one third of Christchurch residents changing address at least once between September 2010 and September 2014. In terms of population displacement, the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) estimates that within

² Unless otherwise stated the facts and figures cited in this section were obtained from various materials publicly available on the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority website, www.cera.govt.nz

³ 'Red Zoning' is a term used to describe land which is so badly damaged that it is likely to take a prolonged period of time before it can be built on again. As a result large scale urban relocation took place in parts of Christchurch.

⁴ The Earthquake Commission is a Crown entity established to provide natural disaster insurance for residential property (contents, dwellings and some coverage of land).

the first week after the February 2011 earthquake approximately 55,000 residents left the city, although the majority of these returned following a short period away. Over the longer term Statistics New Zealand estimates that the population of Christchurch decreased by approximately 3.5 per cent or 13,500 people in the two years from June 2010 to June 2012 (Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, 2014b).

Additionally it is important to highlight the sustained nature of the earthquake and aftershock sequence that characterised the Canterbury earthquakes. Unlike many earthquakes, which have a significant initial quake and then a short period of aftershocks, the Canterbury aftershock sequence continued for several years and included numerous significant earthquakes. By mid-2014 the region had experienced over 13,000 aftershocks, 55 of these over magnitude 5, and 496 above magnitude 4 on the Richter Scale⁵. The ongoing aftershocks resulted in increased uncertainty for insurers and underwriters, delaying settlements and rebuild processes. This sustained disruption to businesses and households had a significant impact on employment levels in the region. A 2011 study by the then Department of Labour indicated that of the 1,750 employers interviewed, 28 per cent had experienced difficulties in retaining employees due to the earthquakes (Department of Labour [DoL], 2011). This figure rose to nearly 50 per cent for larger organisations (those employing 50 or more employees). Figures from the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) for the period following the February 2011 earthquake showed that more than 1,000 employees left the region each month for six consecutive months. The extent to which these departures were solely voluntary cannot be discerned from the IRD data, and there is no publicly available information on voluntary turnover rates for the period following the earthquakes. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that for several large employers in the region, such as the Canterbury District Health Board (Robertson, 2012), Christchurch City Council (Cairns, 2012), and the University of Canterbury (Mathews, 2012), voluntary turnover rates increased significantly in the first two years following the earthquakes.

⁵ The Richter magnitude scale is a 10-point logarithmic scale used to assign a magnitude number to quantify the energy released by an earthquake.

The ongoing earthquake sequence also had a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of Christchurch residents. CERA's Canterbury Wellbeing Index makes use of multiple indicators to track individual wellbeing and social recovery. Annual research by CERA indicated that in addition to immediate increases in stress, anxiety and uncertainty; ongoing housing problems, delayed property repairs and insurance settlements, and loss of social networks kept personal stress in the region at highly elevated levels for a sustained period. Prior to the September 2010 earthquake approximately 90 per cent of Canterbury residents reported having a good or extremely good quality of life. In 2014 this figure had dropped to 74 per cent (Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, 2014a). Data from the Canterbury Wellbeing Index suggests that stress resulting from earthquake-related issues peaked in 2012 and dropped significantly by the end of 2014, although for some residents day-to-day life remains difficult (McLennan, 2015).

While the above synopsis does not, and cannot, fully capture the complexity of the circumstances endured by the residents and businesses of Canterbury, it serves to provide an overview of the salient features of the post-crisis context which served to delimit the timing, design and parameters of the study. These aspects are discussed more fully below.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Selecting the research site and timing of the data collection

As described in the previous chapter, sampling in GTM studies is most often done sequentially, commencing initially with selective sampling followed by more theoretical sampling as the study progresses. Selective sampling involves identifying potential research participants prior to commencement of a study according to a preconceived, but reasonable set of criteria (Coyne, 1997). The unique post-crisis context of this study made the decision on initial 'sampling criteria' somewhat more complex than it ordinarily might be. The focus on understanding the turnover decision-making processes of actual job leavers necessitated identifying and interviewing employees who had voluntarily left their employment in the period following earthquakes. This in itself represented a departure from the predictive designs most commonly employed in turnover studies (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009). As Chapter

2 argued, turnover researchers have typically been reluctant to utilise retrospective self-reports of turnover decision making because of concerns regarding recall bias, inappropriate rationalisations, oversimplification, memory decay, or social acceptability bias (Lee et al., 1996; Maertz & Campion, 2004; Miller, Cardinal, & Glick, 1997; Morrell & Arnold, 2007). These are valid concerns, particularly to those operating within a more positivist research paradigm, where interview data are treated as though they mirror perfectly the participants' realities (Hall & Callery, 2001).

Morrell and Arnold (2007) contend, however, that it is impossible to study 'actual' turnover decision making without relying on retrospective accounts provided by leavers. Moreover, this study's focus on post-crisis decision making requires that it be necessarily retrospective. A prospective research design (e.g. Bitektine, 2007), whereby one collects pre-event predictor data in the anticipation that a significant extra-organisational shock may occur at some point in time in the future, is for the most part unrealistic and impractical. This is particularly true in the case of natural disasters such as earthquakes, the occurrence of which are highly unpredictable. As a consequence it is not uncommon for disaster research studies to commence data collection several months, or even several years, after the actual disaster event (Norris et al., 2002).

Initial consideration was given to collecting data as soon as possible after the September 2010 earthquake by focussing the study on people who left their jobs within the first six months following, as this would capture the impact of both of the major earthquakes. Upon careful consideration, and also following discussions with the head of EAP Counselling Services in the South Island, it was decided to extend this period to a full 18 months following the September 2010 earthquake. The rationale for this decision lay in the dynamic and ongoing nature of the post-crisis context described above. Extending the study's timeframe enabled me to study not only the impact of the initial 'shock' of the earthquakes, but also the cumulative impact of multiple shocks and stressors. As highlighted in Chapter 2, the cumulative impact of shocks is not something which has been examined in the past by turnover researchers. Given the argument that data should be collected as soon as possible after a disaster to avoid issues with memory decay and recall bias (see for example van den

Berg, Wong, van der Velden, Boshuizen, & Grievink, 2012), I did have some initial concern with extending the data collection time frame to 18 months, however, several studies in the management and disaster literatures helped to allay these concerns. For example Norris and Kaniasty (1992) demonstrate that delayed self-reports of traumatic events show remarkable stability and reliability over time. Similar stability was reported by Krinsley, Gallagher, Weathers, Kutter, and Kaloupek (2003). Additionally, Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, et al. (1999) note that significant or vivid personal shocks or events (such as leaving one's job) are held in episodic memory and are therefore likely to be accurately remembered.

Taking all of the above into consideration, in order to be included in the study participants had to meet three criteria. They had to have:

- a) been in paid employment at the time of the September 2010 earthquake;
- b) experienced the September 2010 and/or February 2011 earthquakes; and
- c) left their jobs of their own volition in the 18 months following the initial earthquake.

The above criteria were specific enough to ensure that only people who had left their jobs following the earthquakes were able to participate, while at the same time broad enough to allow participants with differing experiences of the phenomenon to be included in the study as recommended by Starks and Trinidad (2007).

Selecting the research participants

Morrell and Arnold (2007) note that one of the reasons turnover researchers are reluctant to collect retrospective data from actual leavers is that it involves considerable logistical difficulties. In addition to issues with privacy and confidentiality, retrospective designs require that leavers be identified, located and approached to participate in the research; often from dated or inaccurate organisational records. In order to facilitate this process, five large organisations in the Canterbury region were approached and requested to assist with the study. Unlike most organisational research, I was not asking the organisations to 'participate' in my research but rather to act as a conduit between myself and their ex-

employees. The organisations were requested to identify all employees who had left their jobs of their own volition in the study timeframe and then forward to them an invitation to participate in the study. The invitation requested that participants contact the researcher directly if they wished to participate in the study (a copy of the invitation letter can be found in Appendix A). Four of the organisations agreed to assist with the study, the fifth (a provider of in-home nursing and palliative care) declined due to organisational constraints experienced at the time. The four organisations that agreed to assist with the study all requested to remain anonymous, and had all experienced higher than average turnover levels following the earthquakes. Details of the four organisations are contained Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1.

Organisations assisting with participant selection

	<u>Type</u>	<u># of employees</u>	<u>Staff turnover during study period</u>	<u># of invitations sent</u>
Organisation 1	Local government	3,000	Significantly higher	472
Organisation 2	Critical infrastructure	300	Normal average	8
Organisation 3	Higher education institution	1,900	Somewhat higher	220
Organisation 4	Manufacturing company	110	Significantly higher	24

Approximately 70 people responded via email or telephone to the initial invitations. They were subsequently sent a comprehensive information sheet detailing what participation in the study would involve (a copy of the information sheet can be found in Appendix B). At this stage 28 people either declined to participate in the study, or simply failed to make any further contact or respond to follow up email communication, with most citing the time commitment to an interview as their primary reason for not participating. Those still interested in participating were informed that they would be contacted in due course to arrange a time and venue for an interview.

Maintaining balance between selective and theoretical sampling

Given the sequential nature of sampling in GTM studies, moving from selective to theoretical, it was not known at the commencement of the study whether or not it would be necessary to collect data from all of the people who had responded to the initial invitation to participate. The balance between selective and theoretical sampling was a challenging one to maintain once data collection had commenced. I had intended to follow very closely the GTM tenets of theoretical sampling and constant comparison, and thereby analyse data as soon as possible after it was collected. However, the initial response to participate in the study was very positive, which left two options. Option 1, collect all of the data prior to commencing any form of analysis; which would violate several key tenets of GTM. Alternatively, Option 2, spread the interviews out over a more prolonged period of time in order to allow for concurrent data collection and analysis. This, however, came with the risk that participants would become discouraged or lose interest in the study. Such difficulties are not uncommon in GTM studies and a degree of pragmatism was therefore required in resolving them (Coyne, 1997; Draucker et al., 2007b; Suddaby, 2006). Following discussions with a close colleague, who was a more seasoned GTM researcher, the decision was taken to cluster data collection in sets of three to four interviews. This approach allowed for the interview protocol and questions to be adapted to incorporate emergent themes following each cluster of interviews, thereby ensuring that data collection proceeded on theoretical grounds despite participants initially being identified on the basis of pre-determined criteria.

The final number of participants was therefore not determined *a priori*, but rather guided by the GTM tenets of theoretical sampling and saturation. Ultimately 31 people participated formally in the study⁶; a sample size quite typical for GTM studies. Coincidentally, a study examining sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews as the primary means of data collection found the average sample size across 560 studies to be

⁶ A number of additional interviews were held with key informants prior to and following the main data collection period. These included the head of EAP Services in the South Island, several human resource managers and a number of leavers who were happy to be interviewed and share their stories with me but did not wish to have their data formally included in the study.

31 participants (Mason, 2010). For studies using GTM this mean rose slightly to 32, with a range of 4 – 87. Similarly, Starks and Trinidad (2007) cite a range of 10 – 60 participants as being typical for GTM studies. Basic demographic data of the participants are included in Table 4.2 below, with additional details provided in Chapter 5. For reasons of confidentiality all of names used in Table 4.2, and the remainder of this thesis, are pseudonyms.

Table 4.2
Profiles of research participants

<u>Name</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Currently residing</u>
Leonard	Male	45	Higher education institution	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Eleanor	Female	27	Critical infrastructure	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Wendy	Female	51	Local government	Christchurch
Robby	Male	35	Local government	United Kingdom
Rosemary	Female	56	Local government	Christchurch
Jillian	Female	36	Local government	Christchurch
Barry	Male	35	Local government	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Colby	Male	50	Manufacturing company	Christchurch
Gordon	Male	29	Local government	Australia
Monique	Female	42	Local government	United Kingdom
Leona	Female	33	Local government	Christchurch
Lydia	Female	22	Local government	United States
Harriette	Female	54	Local government	Christchurch
Vincent	Male	32	Local government	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Desiree	Female	28	Local government	Australia
Simon	Male	42	Manufacturing company	Christchurch
Aubrey	Male	52	Critical infrastructure	Christchurch

<u>Name</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Currently residing</u>
Alec	Male	34	Local government	Christchurch
Robin	Female	28	Local government	Australia
Bernice	Female	23	Local government	Christchurch
Bethany	Female	31	Local government	Elsewhere in New Zealand
James	Male	22	Local government	United States
Quinton	Male	36	Local government	Christchurch
Stella	Female	55	Local government	Australia
Kate	Female	26	Local government	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Doris	Female	52	Local government	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Brenda	Female	48	Local government	Christchurch
Trevor	Male	55	Local government	Christchurch
Raquel	Female	48	Local government	Christchurch
Annie	Female	46	Higher education institution	Elsewhere in New Zealand
Estelle	Female	57	Postal services ⁷	Christchurch

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The choice of interviews as the primary data collection strategy

Developing a robust grounded theory is contingent on gathering rich data (Charmaz, 2014). Accordingly, interviewing is the most common, but not only, method of data collection in GTM studies, remembering Glaser's maxim that 'all is data'. Corbin and Strauss (2008) note that the richest data tends to come from unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews are not dictated by a pre-determined set of interview questions and answers, and are often likened to 'conversations with purpose' (Burgess, 2002). By not imposing any *a priori*

⁷ Theoretical sampling lead to one additional interview being conducted outside of the original sample.

categorisation on the interview conversation, one is able to gather richer and more nuanced data from participants. In doing so, the intention is to expose the researcher to unanticipated themes and concepts as different patterns and structures emerge from interviews. This does not, however, imply that the researcher should have no control or influence over the direction of the interview, nor does it imply that each interview starts as a 'blank canvas'. It is important that some direction be given to the interview, both to focus the interview on the research problem and emergent analysis, and for the benefit of research participants who often need clarity on the purpose, direction and intent of the interview. It is not uncommon for unstructured interviews to take on a loose structure guided by initial empirical interests and ideas the research might have regarding important areas to explore. Therefore, prior to commencing the first interview, I developed a tentative interview guide by drawing on sensitising concepts. Sensitising concepts play an important role in grounded theory interviewing and are described by Charmaz (2014, p. 16) as "general concepts that form a loose frame for examining the research problem". These concepts most often come from the researcher's disciplinary background and provide guidance on which initial ideas to pursue and what types of questions to ask of participants at the outset of a study. If initial sensitising concepts prove to be irrelevant they are dispensed with. As a result the structure and content of interviews evolves as a GTM study progresses.

Developing the interview guide

With my own disciplinary background in the area of human resource management and voluntary turnover, I was very conscious of not wanting to impose too rigidly any preconceived frameworks on my data collection or analysis. I did, however, not enter the research setting *tabula rasa*. Initial sensitising concepts were drawn from the turnover literature and my personal experience of, and thoughts about, the post-crisis context. Given the context of the study it was appropriate to draw on existing concepts from the turnover literature such as 'shocks' and 'scripts'. Additionally, with the focus on turnover decision making, I was comfortable with introducing concepts such as 'job satisfaction' and 'job search' in early interviews. While these concepts do feature strongly in the extant turnover literature, and as such may be viewed as 'imposing a structure on the data collection', it is difficult to

see how one could have a conversation about leaving an organisation without discussing such concepts as job satisfaction or job search. Sensitising concepts were thus used in developing the initial interview protocol. This consisted of two sets of questions. The first set contained three broad questions which were designed to allow the participant to tell their story, and talk unconstrained about their experience. Corbin and Morse (2003, p. 339) refer to such questions as “grand tour questions”. The three questions that were common to all interviews and used at the start of each interview were:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your time working for XYZ company;
- Tell me about the circumstances leading up to your decision to leave XYZ company;
- What impact did the earthquakes have on your decision to leave?

The second set of questions was more structured and drew upon on the sensitising concepts. These questions served as ‘backup prompts’ which could be used to advance the interview if the participants had any difficulty articulating their experience. They also aided in probing deeper or responding to interviewee comments where required. In hindsight, and upon reflection, the second set of questions were for the most part unnecessary and largely created to provide me with a structure and the confidence I needed, as a relatively novice GTM researcher, to commence the data collection process. In the vast majority of the interviews the first three questions sufficed in generating rich data. On reflection I had perhaps underestimated how comfortable participants would be with sharing their stories and how easy it would be to create conversational intimacy and trust based on the fact that we shared a common experience in the Canterbury earthquakes.

As data collection and analysis progressed, the interview protocol was adapted to incorporate emergent concepts and themes, although every interview was started with the same three ‘grand tour questions’. Emergent themes were introduced into the conversation only once participants had ‘told their story’. This was done to ensure that the emergent concepts were not introduced too early in the conversation and that there was not unnecessary leading of the participants.

Interview process and protocol

In endorsing unstructured and semi-structured interviewing techniques, Corbin and Morse (2003) are also careful to point out the potential risks associated with their use, particularly in studies dealing with sensitive research topics. Given that I was asking participants to talk about their post-crisis decision making at a time when there were still ongoing aftershocks, I was very conscious of the associated risks. Accordingly, and following the guidelines provided by Corbin and Morse (2003), several steps were taken prior to, during, and after each interview in order to mitigate any psychological risk associated with participation. These are discussed below.

Once an individual had agreed to participate they were contacted personally to clarify their involvement in the study and to arrange a suitable time and place to conduct an interview. This in itself proved quiet interesting. Some participants seemed very comfortable participating in the study and expressed no concerns with the study's aims or data collection methods. For others the process of building trust and rapport took longer, which in some cases resulted in a substantial period of time passing between initial contact being made and conducting the interview. In order to minimise the impact of any perceived status differences between myself and the participants, interviews were located in a neutral setting of the participant's choosing.

Given the nature of the study not all interviews were able to take place face to face, as some participants had left the local region or New Zealand altogether. These interviews were then conducted either telephonically or via video conference using Skype. Of the 31 interviews conducted, 18 took place face to face, 6 took place telephonically or via Skype with people living in New Zealand but outside of Christchurch, and 7 took place telephonically or via Skype with people who lived outside of New Zealand.

During the pre-interview phase the purpose of the study and interview were reiterated to participants. Aspects of confidentiality, and how this would be maintained throughout the process, were explained to participants, following which they were asked to sign a consent

form, see Appendix C. For interviews conducted telephonically or via Skype, oral consent was obtained. The consent form also sought permission to make an audio recording of the interview, with all participants agreeing to this. Accordingly, all interviews, including telephone and Skype, were recorded using a digital dictaphone. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable, and that they had the right to refuse to answer any particular question. Participants were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and that such withdrawal could entail withdrawing entirely from the study, or withdrawing certain statements made during the interview, either at the end of the interview or once the transcript of the interview had been reviewed. Prior to an interview commencing brief instructions were provided to participants, explaining that they should think of the interview, not in a formal sense, but rather as a structured conversation and an opportunity for them to share their story. This set the tone for the interview to come and further helped build trust and reciprocity with participants.

Once formalities were concluded the interview commenced, oftentimes tentatively, as some participants were unsure as to how to respond to the broad opening questions or were nervous about discussing their experiences. Quite often participants would respond with “How much do you want to know” or “How far back would you like me go” or “I’m not sure if this is relevant, but....”. Corbin and Morse (2003) describe this as the ‘tentative phase’ of an interview whereby participants attempt to clarify what and how much of their story can be told. I was conscious not to prompt too forcefully during this phase so as not to lead the participants down a particular path. Where participants struggled to get started ‘soft prompts’ were used such as “how long had you worked for X company” or “tell me a little bit about the work you did at X company”. Generally, this was sufficient to advance the interview. Most interviews commenced with participants discussing their employment and life situation prior to leaving, and from there progressed somewhat naturally into a discussion of the circumstances leading up to their decision to leave and the influence that the earthquake sequence had on their decision. It was often at this point that participants became quite engrossed in the interview and were able to speak for prolonged periods with little prompting required. Corbin and Morse (2003) refer to this as the ‘immersion phase’ of an interview.

Several participants became quite emotional when recounting their circumstances. In this regard, the sharing of a common context allowed me to express genuine empathy towards my participants. I was, however, conscious of the fact (and regularly reminded by my thesis supervisors) that my role was that of researcher and not counsellor. I therefore never provided advice or counselling to participants, but rather referred them to appropriate resources once the interview was concluded. Corbin and Morse (2003) further stress that the researcher should never end an interview during the immersion phase, and thereby run the risk that the participant leaves in a distressed state. Instead they recommend purposefully downshifting to a less emotional 'emergence phase'. My second set of interview questions helped in this regard to bridge the immersion and emergence phases of each interview. These questions tended to focus on less emotional or sensitive topics such as their job search behaviour or positive consequences of leaving.

During the final phase of each interview I sought to validate or clarify my understanding of what had been stated, a process known as 'member checking' (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007; Seale, 1999). In doing so an attempt was made to 'play back' my interpretation of the participant's decision process and verify if this initial interpretation and reconstruction of their decision process was accurate. Member checking is a crucial technique for establishing the credibility of qualitative research findings. Member checking was also used in the final stages of the interview to explore emergent concepts, as well as the overall emerging theoretical framework.

Interviews were concluded with a final question whereby participants were asked about their motivation for agreeing to participate in the study and whether they felt that participation had been meaningful or helpful to them. This generally ensured that participants left the interview setting in a positive frame of mind and a willingness to participate in any follow up interviews or member checking.

Interview transcription, verification and data storage

The duration of interviews varied, ranging from 30 – 69 minutes, with the average interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. All participants agreed to their interview being recorded. Immediately following the interview the digital recording was transcribed into a text document. Transcription of the interviews was undertaken by a professional transcription company with whom a confidentiality agreement was signed. This resulted in 518 pages of typed verbatim interview transcript for analysis. Additionally, hand written notes were made during each interview to record observations, thoughts, and aspects for further inquiry. These notes were included in the overall dataset. In order to verify the accuracy of the transcripts, and also to afford participants the opportunity to edit, correct, add or remove any statements, transcripts were returned to participants via email. Participants were requested to respond within seven days with any changes. In two cases this resulted in minor corrections or additions being made to the transcript.

Assurances of confidentiality provided to all participants necessitated strict data storage procedures. To preserve confidentiality, all identifying information of participants was stored in a separate database. This database contained the actual names, contact details, and other demographic data such as age, gender, date of leaving and so forth. The database also contained a pseudonym for each participant, which was used in the file name for their transcript. The actual transcripts did not identify participants by name and all identifying information, such as organisation names, colleague's names and so on was removed. Both the participant database and the transcripts were stored in password protected files. When interview transcripts were returned to participants for member checking, the participant was sent the password in a separate email. All files relating to the study were backed up to an external hard drive to mitigate the risk of data loss.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

This section outlines that data analysis procedures used, including the coding process, the use of constant comparative analysis and the analytical tools of memoing and diagramming, as well as the application of Corbin and Strauss' (2008) conditional matrix. As

mentioned previously, interviews were transcribed and analysed in batches in order to ensure the analysis proceeded in accordance with the key GTM tenets of theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis. Data analysis proceeded through three stages of coding: Open coding (exploring, conceptualising, categorising and comparing data); focused and axial coding (reassembling data around key categories in order to determine the nature of the relationships between and within categories); and selective or theoretical coding (identifying and describing the central phenomenon in the data). Although the section that follows depicts the analytical process as linear, moving from one form of coding to the next, the reality is that several steps in the analysis took place concurrently or iteratively. For example, while each transcript was subjected to open coding, I did not wait until open coding for all interviews was completed before commencing more focussed coding and other forms of analysis. While presenting the analytical process in linear fashion is helpful for readers of this thesis it represents, as Harry, Sturges, and Klingner (2005) note, a vast simplification of a complicated, iterative and oftentimes messy cognitive process.

Open coding and memoing

Coding of interviews commenced as soon as possible after their transcription. Working inductively, each individual transcript was subjected to rigorous line-by-line coding in order to scrutinise the meaning or essence of the data and identify concepts from the raw data. Open coding also served to identify the properties (i.e. characteristics that define and describe the concept) and dimensions (i.e. variation within properties) of the emergent concepts. As far as possible I followed the advice of Charmaz (2010) to code in gerunds so as to more readily identify emergent links between processes in the data. I found that I was able to code swiftly and spontaneously, something that is encouraged by both Charmaz (2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2008).

Methodological reflection: There is no 'one' right way

Asking questions of the data came quite naturally to me, although initially I found this somewhat unsettling and had concerns regarding whether I was 'doing it right' or coding

with sufficient rigor as some codes initially appeared to hold little substance or meaning. However, further reading on coding practice, both generally and within GTM studies, gave me confidence in my approach. Regularly discussing emergent themes and concepts with my senior supervisor also served to allay these initial concerns.

While coding is generally associated with assigning ‘conceptual labels’ to data segments, Corbin and Strauss (2008) caution against treating open coding simply as a mechanical process of fixing labels onto segments of data, as this results in a series of codes with nothing reflective said about what the data are indicating. Initial open coding thus went well beyond assigning labels and was more akin to what Becker (2008, p. 109) describes as a “continuous dialogue with empirical data”, or what Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 163) refer to as “a close encounter with the data”. In this regard coding and memoing took place simultaneously, such that when a code was developed and assigned to a segment of text, I would also write a brief memo capturing my initial thoughts and ideas about the code or data and what I was seeing in the data. These early memos served to capture my personal ‘mental dialogue’ with the data and conceptualise it in narrative form.

Following the advice of Charmaz (2014), memos addressed questions such as “what is going on here?”; “why is the participant saying this?”; “what is driving this?”, “how is this code different or similar to other similar codes?”; all whilst keeping the overall research question in mind. Each memo was labelled with the code it was associated with and the code became the memo title for ease of reference back to the memo as advised by Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 163). Early memoing proved extremely useful in guiding subsequent data collection and analysis. Questions I had about themes or gaps in the data were used to adapt the interview protocol to fit with the emerging analysis. Memoing also served to facilitate the process of constant comparison. It was mainly within memos that data to data, incident to incident and code to code comparisons were made. This was done firstly comparing data with data, both within and between interviews, to establish the degree of uniformity and variation of each code’s properties and dimensions (Boeije, 2002; Holton, 2007); or put more simply to identify similarities and differences in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Similarly, codes were

compared with each other with a view to establishing similarities and differences, as well as interconnections between the codes.

All open coding was done manually in the software programme Microsoft Word using the 'comment' functionality. This process was in essence the same as coding done by hand using a hardcopy of a transcript; a method still preferred by many qualitative researchers. Manual coding, in combination with memoing, allowed me to capture my thoughts and ideas (in the second column) about the data as they occurred, an example of which is presented below for the code '*experiencing organisational disruption*'.

<p>Rosemary: With the earthquake, then that sort of went to the back corner a little bit. To be fair, there wasn't a great immediate need for natural environment work with the earthquake, so I actually ended up doing "Neighbourhood Plans" with the master plan work for Lyttelton and Sydenham.</p>	<p><u><i>Experiencing organisational disruption</i></u></p> <p>The idea of 'organisational disruption' appears to be a recurring theme in the data, particularly for participants in more senior ranks and project-oriented roles, think of participant #4 Robby and his comments that "existing projects were shelved". 'Organisational disruption' is, however, not limited to senior roles as several participants have mentioned this. Other participants have discussed similar disruption to aspects of their lives outside of work and to their normal routines. Perhaps organisational disruption is just one form of 'disruption of routine', a higher order code perhaps or a potential category. Definitely something to think about. It seems that what this participant found rewarding and interesting in her work was 'put on hold', in order to 'deal with' the consequences of the earthquake.</p>
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In addition to constant comparison and memoing, diagramming (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 119) and clustering (Charmaz, 2006, p. 86) were utilised extensively in the early

stages of data analysis. At the end of open coding for each transcript an attempt was made to conceptualise the participant's decision process in a visual form using integrative diagrams. These were simply hand drawn flowcharts on pieces of paper which were then stuck onto a whiteboard for ease of reference throughout the analysis. Having these visual representations of the basic turnover decision-making process for each participant aided the constant comparison process, and also helped in later stages of axial and selective coding and memo sorting.

Once manual coding of each transcript was completed, the data, coding and memos were transferred to the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo10. This was done, not with a view to using NVivo10 to further the analysis in any significant way, but rather to enable the management of a large volume of codes and data. In this sense NVivo10 served as a 'digital filing cabinet' rather than a tool to drive the analysis. The process of open coding resulted in 140 substantive codes (or nodes) being created in NVivo10. This did not represent all of the codes generated through open coding, as many codes either referred to just a single segment of data, were highly descriptive, were not present in other interviews, or simply did not fit with or contribute to the emergent analysis in any meaningful way. It was therefore deemed unnecessary to transfer all of these codes to NVivo10. As Creswell (2007) notes, not all coded data makes it into the final grounded theory rather concepts must 'earn' their way in.

Throughout the coding process constant comparison served, not only as a means to elaborate the analysis, but also to reduce the number of initial codes by comparing concepts to identify common features or themes among them. Codes that shared similar features or related to the same phenomenon were clustered together under tentative first-order categories. These higher-level, more abstract, categories crosscut interviews and subsumed several first-order codes. This allowed coding to proceed in a more conceptual, and less descriptive, way. As an example, participants would often begin an interview by discussing their role in the organisation, describing such things as how long they had been with the organisation (*tenure*⁸), the perceived importance of their job (*role importance*) and whether

⁸ The italicised text in parentheses indicates how the incident was initially coded in the open coding process.

their role was permanent or not (*role permanence*). Comparing data and incidents within and across each of these codes revealed that they were all conceptually related and were used by participants to frame their decision to leave. The codes were therefore grouped together under the first-order category '*decision importance*'. Through later focused coding and memoing this category was elevated even further to '*decision magnitude*' and conceptualised as a key contextual condition influencing the basic turnover decision process (discussed more fully in the chapters that follow). Conceptualising turnover decisions as having differing magnitudes further aided the analysis and allowed me to reconsider, re-analyse and re-organise data through this more focused lens. It also illuminated new questions (through the memoing process) as to whether the nature of the decision-making process might differ according to the magnitude or degree of importance attached to the decision.

While the development and refinement of tentative categories allowed for the identification of recurrent themes and patterns in the data, it also signalled the start of focused coding.

Focussed coding

Open coding serves to break up the data in as many ways as possible. Following this initial 'fracturing', focused coding is used to reassemble data in a more coherent way through categorising the data and then determining the links between categories and sub-categories. Focused coding is a means for sorting through and analysing large amounts of data by focusing on the most salient or frequently occurring initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). Such codes tend to be those that provide the most incisive conceptual handle on the data, as such Charmaz (2014: 189) refers to them as "conceptual categories". Unlike word-by-word or line-by-line coding, focused codes subsume large batches of data and thus allow the analysis to progress more swiftly in line with the emerging theory.

Additionally, focused codes are more conceptual and abstract than initial open codes and are therefore more likely to derive from the analyst's conceptualisation of the data rather than being *in vivo codes* from the data. As a product of the analyst's making, focused codes

tend to explain much more than the data from which they are constructed or abstracted. This involves conceptualising and making explicit a phenomenon that many people might experience but fail to articulate or conceptualise (Charmaz, 2014). An example of this can be found in the code *'experiencing latent disquiet'*. This particular code came in a moment of serendipity following a discussion with my senior supervisor. For some time I had been struggling to make conceptual sense of participants' expressions of *'restlessness'*, *'uneasiness'*, *'a subtle nagging'* and *'back of the mind thoughts'*. What many participants seemed to be describing was not active job dissatisfaction or thoughts of quitting, as typically found in the turnover literature, but rather a sense of unease that all was not right with regards to their career trajectory or fit within the organisation. Many described *'feelings of underutilisation of self'* or *'unanswered callings'*. Unlike traditional job dissatisfaction, these feelings of disquiet were described as fleeting or *'back of the mind thoughts'*. As such, they were seldom subjected to much conscious deliberation or acted upon, hence the code *'experiencing latent disquiet'*.

Methodological reflection: Moments of serendipity

Coming up with the 'experiencing latent disquiet' code was exhilarating, what Charmaz (2011, p. 58) calls an "Aha! Now I understand." moment. It allowed me to see my data in a different way. At the same time, as a novice GTM researcher, it was an unsettling moment. The term 'latent disquiet' was my creation; my abstraction and conceptualisation. None of the participants had mentioned the words 'latent' or 'disquiet' specifically, rather these concepts reflected my interpretation of the data. I thus had concerns that this concept might not be evidenced in the data. On reflection I now recognise that in fact this was the method of GTM working as it should and was encouraged by the advice of Charmaz (2014:145) that focussed codes "represent the analyst's conceptualisation of the data and often explain much more than the data from which they are constructed".

Viewing the data through the lens of *'experiencing latent disquiet'* helped to reveal the data's implicit meaning and answer unresolved, or nagging, questions I had about the

data. The higher-order and more abstract category of '*experiencing latent disquiet*' allowed me to condense the data and reduce the number of initial codes, as well as illuminate new codes. In this regard the '*experiencing latent disquiet*' code raised new questions of the data which served to direct and advance the analysis in a particular direction. For example, I asked questions such as how does latent disquiet influence one's decision to leave? How is latent disquiet surfaced and resolved? What role do shocks play, if any, in surfacing latent disquiet? What happens when latent disquiet becomes active disquiet? These questions were explored in subsequent interviews and data collection activities, as well as retrospectively by recoding the transcripts from earlier interviews more thematically using focused codes. This meant that most transcripts were coded more than once, some several times, each time comparing the data with the category with a view to elaborating on the properties and dimensions of the category.

Focused coding resulted in several important higher order categories being identified quite early in the analysis. These categories are discussed more fully in Chapter 5 and included, among others, '*coming to a realisation*'; '*decision magnitude*'; '*experiencing latent disquiet*'; '*dealing with hiatus*'; '*engaging in critical reflection*' and '*reaching a tipping point*'. Each of these categories held a place of importance and centrality in the emerging theoretical scheme. The links between these categories were, however, not immediately clear to me. They were therefore pursued more analytically and conceptually in order to establish the nature of the relationships between the categories, as well as to elaborate on the properties and dimensions of each category. As Urquhart (2001) notes 'classification' is only one aspect at the heart of coding, 'connection' is the other; further noting that it is the relationships between categories that serve as the 'main engine' of theory building.

Several tools were used to identify the relationships between categories. One such tool, which proved to be particularly useful, was Strauss and Corbin's (1998) axial coding. A common misconception exists that axial coding is a separate, additional, and sometimes unnecessary form of coding (Charmaz, 2014). Corbin and Strauss (2008) contend, however, that in reality the process of breaking apart and putting the data back together happens simultaneously and that distinctions drawn between open, focused and axial coding are

unwarranted. This was certainly how axial coding was treated in analysing the data for this thesis, however, it is explained as a separate step below for ease of readability.

Axial coding

The aim of axial coding is to bring fractured data back together into a coherent whole by sorting, synthesising and reassembling the data in new ways (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Axial coding offers a systematic means for understanding how lower-order codes relate to higher-order categories, and in turn how these categories relate to one another, by answering questions pertaining to ‘when, where, why, who, how and with what consequences’ of the data (Charmaz, 2014). In answering these questions the analyst is better able to elaborate on the properties and dimensions of a category, as well as integrate categories to form a substantive theory of action.

In analysing the data for this thesis, two key axial coding tools were used, namely diagramming and conditional-consequential matrices. The use of diagramming has already been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter; hence the discussion below focuses on the use of conditional-consequential matrices.

Axial coding entails centrally locating a category of importance and then developing a network of relationships around the axis of the category. Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) conditional-consequential matrix proved a very helpful analytical tool for achieving this, as it provided an organising scheme (or coding paradigm) for conceptualising the data, which seemed to fit very well with the nature of the topic being studied. The conditional-consequential matrix prompts the analyst to consider the causes and contextual, or intervening, conditions which contribute to the occurrence of the axial category or central phenomenon. It also requires that the analyst consider the actions participants engage in and the consequences of these actions.

Methodological reflection: The use of conditional-consequential matrices

The imposition of a singular coding paradigm on the analysis is seen as a step too far for some grounded theory users. As Charmaz (2014:147) notes “axial coding has received some accolades and considerable criticism”. Much of this criticism stems from the view that axial coding restricts the analyst to a particular coding paradigm; thereby ‘forcing’ the data rather than allowing it to emerge. While this may be fair critique, the use of coding paradigms is not uncommon in GTM studies. In fact, Glaser (1978) identifies 18 different potential coding paradigms/families, one of which is the Six C’s, focusing on causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions; thus not dissimilar to the conditional-consequential matrix. My decision to use this particular matrix was based primarily on a judgement of fit with the research problem at hand. Understanding causes, context, actions and consequences seemed to me to fit logically with attempting to understand and describe people’s decisions to leave their jobs within a dynamic and unique context.

In the paragraphs that follow I use the category of ‘*engaging in critical reflection*’ to provide an example of how axial coding was undertaken.

At a relatively early stage in the analysis it became apparent that ‘*engaging in critical reflection*’ played a central role in the decision making of many of the participants, yet was strikingly absent in others. In order to understand why this might be the case, participants were grouped according to the presence or absence of critical reflection as part of their decision process. Locating ‘*engaging in critical reflection*’ centrally in the analysis enabled me to create a network of tentative relationships around this axial code. This was achieved by re-analysing each case more closely and coding for if, when, how, and why participants engaged in critical reflection. The application of the conditional-consequential matrix as a coding paradigm focused the analysis on identifying the causal conditions which appeared to trigger people engaging in critical reflection and the context or structural conditions in which such reflection took place. This more focused coding revealed that participants who engaged in critical reflection generally also experienced a period of ‘*hiatus*’ or prolonged disruption of routine.

In order to more fully understand the nature of the relationship between these two categories I utilised a basic 2 x 2 matrix and coded for the presence of just '*engaging in critical reflection*', the presence of just '*hiatus*', the presence of both, and the absence of both. This resulted in the participants fitting into one of four groups. The constant comparison method was then used to identify similarities and differences within and across groups leading to the discovery that '*hiatus*' was an enabling condition for engaging in '*engaging in critical reflection*'.

In addition to the use of matrices, diagrams and clustering were utilised as part of the axial coding process (Charmaz, 2014). As a clearer understanding of the relationships between categories developed, these were portrayed in diagrams. For example, diagrams were used to chart the basic decision process for each of the four groups of participants identified by the hiatus/reflection matrix. These were most often hand drawn flow diagrams on scraps of paper which often ended up being stuck on the walls of my office to keep the data 'front and centre' at all times. Diagramming helped to identify additional tentative relationships between categories which were then explored further. Throughout this process I repeatedly asked the question 'which phenomena are central and why'. This questioning took place mostly in analytical memos but also in regular discussion with my senior supervisor and other colleagues.

Methodological reflection: The importance of abduction and theoretical sensitivity.

Most often relationships between categories were derived inductively, that is through their more obvious presence in the data. There were, however, occasions where relationships were less clear or seemingly missing. In such cases an abductive approach was used to generate tentative hypotheses regarding the relationships between categories, particularly when faced with unexpected and surprising data (Klag & Langley, 2013; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction involved taking a conceptual leap in order to bridge an apparent gap in my data. These hypothesised relationships were repeatedly checked through constant comparison with both existing and new data. Often my 'analytical hunches' turned out to be nothing more than that and were simply not evidenced in my data and were therefore not pursued any further;

on other occasions they lead to significant insights, which served to further the analysis and re-energise me as a researcher.

My own ability to take conceptual 'leaps of faith' and operate in an abductive way grew as the analysis progressed and I became more comfortable with the process. I believe, however, that this ability was enhanced by my theoretical sensitivity with respect to both the research area and the research context. My familiarity with the existing turnover literature, and also more broadly with other areas in the social sciences, as well as my commonly shared experience of the Canterbury earthquakes enabled me to pick up on the nuances and complexities in the data. I was thus able to 'see' certain data and relationships that were not obviously evident in the participant's words and also separate the pertinent from that which was not (Kelle, 2007; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006)

Axial coding also served to identify deviant, or negative, cases and facilitated the exploration of these cases in greater detail. For example, as was previously mentioned not all participants engaged in a process of critical reflection. Initially I was troubled by this and worried about the robustness of the '*engaging in critical reflection*' category and its centrality in the analysis. I therefore interrogated the negative cases more closely examining why it was that certain participants failed to engage in critical reflection. I questioned whether the absence of critical reflection was because the participant's specific context prohibited it, or whether it was attributable in some way to the nature of the decision being made. Examining negative cases more closely during axial coding not only allayed my concerns regarding the robustness of the '*engaging in critical reflection*' category, it provided answers to several nagging questions I had regarding the role of '*decision magnitude*', '*decision control*', and '*decision locus*'. It also added support to an earlier inference that turnover decisions take multiple forms and are shaped by contextual influences. Ultimately, this resulted in a further reorganisation and sequencing of the data and subsequent categorisation of participants, which is discussed more fully in chapters which follow.

In addition to exploring the relationships between categories, axial coding was used in expounding the properties and dimensions of important categories. For example, once

'hiatus' emerged as an important category it was examined more closely by coding for the type of hiatus experienced (*'organisational disruption'* versus *'disruption of general routine'*), the duration of the hiatus (*'prolonged'* or *'short'*) and whether the hiatus was *'involuntary'* or *'self-imposed'*. Such elaboration of the properties of the *'hiatus'* category allowed for a far more nuanced understanding of the contextual conditions under which *'hiatus'* enabled *'engaging in critical reflection'*, rather than simply stating that hiatus is necessary for reflection and ending the analysis prematurely.

Theoretical sampling and saturation

Relationships between categories that were seemingly important, but appeared tenuous or underspecified, necessitated the collection of additional data. Similarly, intriguing but conceptually thin categories, or codes which appeared to be *'unanchored'* in the dataset signalled that a point of theoretical saturation had yet to be reached and that further data collection and analysis was required. To this end, theoretical sampling was used to ensure that important codes and categories were fully saturated and described. For example, the concepts of *'engaging in critical reflection'* and *'hiatus'* became embedded in the interview protocol with specific questions added to probe the participant's experiences of these emergent concepts. In this way data collection became more focussed as it progressed and allowed for the elaboration of important categories. However, each new interview still began with the same three broad questions that had been used in earlier interviews. Emergent concepts were only brought into the interview once participants had shared their initial story.

This more focused data collection continued until all important categories were fully saturated, that is and no new properties within, or relationships between, categories emerged and the addition of further data added little to the analysis. Dey (2007) likens the point of theoretical saturation to that of a sodden sponge which can hold no additional water. It is the point at which categories, and the final grounded theory, require no further refinement.

Memo sorting and diagramming were then utilised to integrate the saturated categories into a tentative theoretical scheme, or basic turnover decision-making process, which was subjected to further scrutiny through member checking and consultation with my supervisors and experts in the field.

Theoretical integration

The final phase of data analysis in a GTM study involves selective coding, or as Glaser (1998) prefers to call it ‘theoretical coding’. During selective coding the analyst identifies a central or ‘core’ category and then relates all substantive categories to the core category in the form of relational statements, often stated as hypotheses or propositions. This is done with the aim of producing a coherent theoretical framework that explains the basic social process being studied (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The core category represents the main theme embodied in the research and is deemed to have the most analytical power and highest potential to hold all other categories together. Stern and Porr (2011, p. 66) refer to a core category as one which represents the “point of convergence in the data” and the “hinge pin that holds all of the participant’s stories together”. Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 105) provide a somewhat more useful set of criteria for selecting a core category, noting that it should:

- Be sufficiently abstract to allow all other categories to be related to it and also so that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas;
- Appear frequently in the data;
- Be logical and consistent with the data;
- Grow in depth and explanatory power as each of the other categories is related to it through relational statements.

Below I discuss the process used to identify the core category in my emerging theory. My initial analysis seemed to suggest that ‘*engaging in critical reflection*’ represented the core category and hence I set about relating all other substantive categories to the ‘*engaging in critical reflection*’ category. This entailed a substantial reorganisation and categorisation of

the data. To facilitate this process I made use of a Microsoft Excel database to record the incidence of substantive categories for each individual participant. As a starting point I only recorded the incidence of '*engaging in critical reflection*', '*hiatus*' and '*reaching a tipping point*' in the database. I then proceeded to record the incidence of additional categories and codes in the database. The choice of which categories to include in the database was based on earlier axial coding, memoing and subsequent memo sorting. In total 13 categories were added to the database. Each time a category was added I would rearrange/sort the database around the '*engaging in critical reflection*' category in an attempt to elaborate on and better understand the nature of the relationships between categories. In essence the process was a form of electronic memo sorting and was, as Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 145) so aptly put it, "a recursive search for consistency and logic in the emerging theoretical scheme" in order to account for both complementary and competing strands of evidence. Each new sorting of the database and associated memos resulted in the identification and refinement of the salient features of participants' decision-making processes. More importantly, however, the analysis led to four groups of leavers being identified, with participants in each of the groups following quite distinct decision paths (discussed more fully in Chapter 7).

Methodological reflection: Qualitative data analysis is a messy business

My first attempt at reorganising and categorising my data was done in NVivo 10 and I found the process unwieldy and unhelpful, hence I used a simpler and more manual process in Microsoft Excel. This software is, however, not very helpful when it comes to visualising data, especially when working with a large number of rows and columns. I thus took Charmaz' (2006) advice to turn off my computer and resorted to printing off the database on large A3 pieces of paper and taping them together to enable a 'full' view of the database. I would then lay this out on my office floor, making handwritten notes and memos on bits of paper and use highlighters to colour code and categorise participants. I would often carry off the rather large 'work of art' to my supervisor's office to discuss my ideas and conceptions. Being able to see the 'bigger picture' and discuss this with my supervisors and colleague gave real impetus to the analysis.

THEORETICAL VALIDATION AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Validation is an important final step in a GTM study and entails refining and verifying the emergent ground theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although presented here as the final step in the analysis, the verification of concepts, categories and relationships within the theoretical scheme was woven into the analysis, and therefore took place iteratively throughout the research process (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Two particular verification strategies were utilised, namely constant comparison and member checking. The use of both the constant comparison method and member checking has been discussed previously and is thus not discussed further here in detail. However, a brief elaboration on the appropriateness and use of member checking as a means of theory validation is warranted here.

As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, member checking was used at the end of each interview to play back to the participants my interpretation of their decision process and to check the accuracy of these interpretations. Similarly, member checking was used to verify the accuracy of the transcripts produced for each individual interview, and to clarify any misconceptions. Member checks, or participant validation, are also sometimes advocated as an appropriate tool for validating the end product of a grounded theory study or other qualitative research (Horsburgh, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, Morse et al. (2002) and Cho and Trent (2006) caution against the use of member checking for the validation of the findings of the research study as a whole. They argue that the final grounded theory is abstracted from a synthesis of perspectives provided by a number of participants, and that it is inappropriate to expect individual participants to have the ability to validate the findings of the research study as whole. The utilisation of member checks to validate the final grounded theory is particularly problematic for researchers operating within an interpretivist paradigm, as it suggests a single true reality, which runs counter to a central premise of this particular paradigm. In attending to this particular issue, Tracy (2010) suggests that member checks should be used not as a test of research findings but rather an opportunity for collaboration and elaboration. Therefore in keeping with the advice of Morse et al. (2002) and others, I did not utilise member checks as a means of final theory validation. I did, however, seek to assess

the plausibility and resonance of my findings with key participants and other audiences. I regularly discussed the findings and my interpretations with my colleagues and supervisors, but also with audiences who had no direct experience of the study or the lived experience of the participants. I spoke about my research and my findings to anyone who would listen. I also shared my initial findings at two international conferences and one seminar within my University, and on almost all occasions my categorisation of leavers and the description of their decision making resonated strongly with audiences.

While agreeing with the assertions of Morse et al. (2002) not to use members checks for final validation, Horsburgh (2003, p. 310) does, however, contend that if overall findings were to be presented back to participants they should at least not be wholly unrecognisable or incomprehensible; rather the final findings or theory should elicit recognition by the participants and be deemed applicable and relevant to their situations, experiences, and perceptions. Horsburgh's point highlights the need for criteria against which the quality of qualitative research findings can be assessed. Whether such criteria should be generic to all qualitative research is a topic of ongoing debate in methodological circles (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Pratt, 2009). For example, Tracy (2010) proposes a set of eight criteria which she argues are applicable to all forms of qualitative research. The more accepted view, however, is that the means to assess the plausibility and trustworthiness of qualitative findings should vary according to the research question being addressed and the methodology employed (Horsburgh, 2003). With specific reference to research employing grounded theory methods Glaser (1978), Charmaz (2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) all multiple criteria for evaluating the quality of research findings. These criteria are reproduced in Table 4.3.

The criteria listed in Table 4.3 are discussed briefly in the paragraphs that follow in terms of their application in this thesis. As this thesis primarily drew upon Strauss and Corbin (2008) and Charmaz's (2014) approaches to grounded theory, emphasis is placed on the criteria proposed by these authors, however, where appropriate reference is also made to the eight generic criteria for excellent qualitative research proposed by Tracy (2010).

Table 4.3*Criteria for evaluating grounded theory*

<i>Glaser (1978)</i>	<i>Charmaz (2014)</i>	<i>Corbin and Strauss (2008)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fit - Work - Relevance - Modifiability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Credibility - Originality - Resonance - Usefulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fit - Applicability - Concepts - Contextualisation of concepts - Logic - Depth - Variation - Creativity - Sensitivity - Evidence of memos

Given the earlier discussion regarding validation and member checking, it is perhaps apt to begin with a discussion of *'fit'* as this criterion has, to an extent, already been addressed above. Fit refers to the extent to which research findings reflect and resonate with the experience of the research participants and the professional audiences for whom the research was conducted (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The criterion of fit is not dissimilar to Charmaz (2014) or Tracy's (2010) 'resonance'. Tracy (2010) states that quality research findings have aesthetic merit and reverberate meaningfully with readers, promoting identification and empathy by audiences who have no direct experience with the topic studied. Charmaz (2014) views resonance as the degree to which findings portray the fullness of the studied experience, and the extent to which they offer participants deeper insights into their lives and worlds. Glaser (1978) has a slightly different take on fit and views it as a close correspondence between a final theory and the substantive data from which it was derived. He argues that the quality of findings can be judged by the extent to which they are evidenced in the data, and the degree to which codes and categories are emergent, rather than preconceived from extant theory (Holton, 2008). Related to this conception of fit, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that high quality research goes beyond simple description by presenting findings that are organised around *'concepts'* and themes, thus providing evidence of abstraction and conceptualisation.

As Morse notes:

“... qualitative research must add something more to the participants’ words for it to be considered a research contribution, whether this be synthesis, interpretation, or development of a concept, model, or theory” (Morse, 1999, p. 163).

‘Contextualisation of concepts’. Additionally, Corbin and Strauss (2008) cite the need for concepts to be contextually grounded, through the active acknowledgement of the impact that the participant’s context might have in facilitating or preventing action. In this thesis particular emphasis was placed on the importance of context through the application of the conditional-consequential matrix as previously discussed. Furthermore, the degree to which concepts are systematically related and linked together to form a **‘logical’** explanation of the process being studied is another marker of quality (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To this end findings need to be plausible and make logical sense ensuring that the reader is not left confused or in doubt about their integrity. Charmaz (2014) views logic as a key determinant of the broader criterion relating to the **‘credibility’** of the research findings. Additional markers of credibility include the extent to which research findings demonstrate an intimate familiarity with, and offer rich and thick descriptions of, the research setting. For findings to be considered credible research claims need to be substantiated by a **‘depth’** of substance (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This entails providing in-depth and vivid illustrations, accounts and details which explicate the participants’ lived experience. Weick (2007) adds that depth and richness are generated through the purposeful incorporation of a variety of theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts and samples.

‘Variation’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) or **‘multivocality’** (Tracy, 2010) are therefore also proposed as indicators quality research findings. In this regard high quality research findings and theory should accommodate the multiple and varied voices of participants in the analysis and final report, and should provide examples of negative cases which demonstrate differences in the properties or dimensions of a category. The use of negative cases and the accommodation of variation in this thesis have been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

Tracy (2010) states that ensuring multivocality of the research findings necessitates a close and intense collaboration between researcher and participant. The extent to which researchers demonstrate **'sensitivity'** throughout this collaboration is viewed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as a further indicator of quality research. Here sensitivity is implied in both the human and theoretical senses. From a human perspective, qualitative research should be judged by the degree to which it was conducted in an ethical manner and with due consideration for its impacts on lives of the participants who were studied. Matters of human ethics approval, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and participant safety were key considerations in the design and conduct of this study and have been discussed in detail in earlier sections of this chapter. From a theoretical perspective, sensitivity refers to the manner in which data are handled throughout the study, that is the extent to which the data were 'allowed to speak for themselves' rather than forced into preconceived categories or theoretical schema. In this regard **'sincerity'** and **'self-reflexivity'** are important, particularly for research operating within an interpretive or constructivist paradigm. High quality research illustrates transparency with regards to the positionality of the researcher and the influence of their biases, goals, and foibles on the study's design and findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Tracy, 2010). Throughout this thesis I have attempted to address this particular aspect. In Chapter 3 I discuss how my own ontological and epistemological position influenced the choice of research design and methodology. In the present chapter I have made use of methodological reflections to capture my personal toils with the grounded theory method and to express a self-awareness of my influence on the research process.

A final, but no less important, marker of quality research is **'applicability'**. Applicability refers to the usefulness of the research findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and is similar to Tracy's (2010) 'significant contribution', Glaser's (1978) 'relevance', and Charmaz's (2014) 'usefulness'. Research findings of a high quality should offer new insights leading to significant contributions, both conceptually and practically. Strauss and Corbin (2008) agree that research contributions should unearth new understandings of a topic and should be presented in ways that are **'creative'** and innovative. High quality research "turns common sense assumptions on their head" (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). Additionally, Tracy (2010) notes that

high quality research may lead to contributions which are of methodological significance from a qualitative study of a concept that has previously only been examined from a quantitative perspective, as it the case of this thesis. The theoretical, practical and methodological implications of the present study are discussed fully in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In concluding this chapter it is appropriate to discuss one final criterion for judging quality in grounded theory studies. The aforementioned criteria were all criteria for judging the final ‘product’ of a GTM study. Glaser (2003) argues, however, that the quality of the final grounded theory can be enhanced through close adherence to the central canons and tenets of the grounded theory methodology and the rigorous application of its methods. Research should thus be judged not on the quality of the findings alone, but also in terms of the *‘rigor’* of the processes followed in generating these findings. To this end, the preceding chapter outlined the care and practice that went into selecting and engaging with research participants; collecting, analysing and interpreting data; and maintaining ethical integrity throughout the research process. Read together, Chapters 3 and 4 are an attempt to demonstrate what Corbin and Strauss (2008) call *‘methodological consistency’*, by clearly identifying the purpose of the study, selecting a research methodology appropriate to this purpose, and implementing the methodology in a manner which is consistent with the central features of the grounded theory method.

Chapters 5 and 6, which follow, present the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

Research Findings: Part 1

Deconstructing shocks

INTRODUCTION

Extant literature on employee turnover views it as an individual decision-making process based on interaction between the employee and their work environment. Traditional process models present turnover as a rational step-by-step process that progresses in a relatively predictable order, influenced primarily by desirability and ease of movement. Such parsimonious explanations are geared towards producing generalisable theory which transcends contextual and relational complexities.

However, the findings presented in this chapter will demonstrate that turnover decision making, as explained by those enacting the decision, is in fact far more complex and nuanced than proposed by traditional turnover models. More importantly, the findings reveal that contextual influences bring considerable variation to actual turnover decision making.

This chapter commences with a discussion of pre-shock motivational state and illustrates that the vast majority of participants in this study were neither dissatisfied with their jobs nor actively looking for alternative employment prior to leaving, as is often assumed by traditional turnover models. The discussion then moves to the different impacts that the earthquake sequence had on participants' decision making, distinguishing between three unique shock roles. Chapter 6, which follows, examines the actual decision-making processes that participants engaged in.

DECONSTRUCTING SHOCKS: EARTHQUAKE IMPACTS AND THE VARIED ROLE OF SHOCKS

The presentation of the study's findings commences with an analysis of the impact that the earthquake sequence (hereafter referred to as 'the shock' or 'shocks') had on the participant's decisions to leave their organisation. The Canterbury earthquakes of September 4 and February 22 were unique in terms of the prolonged aftershocks that were recorded. By 2014, more than 14,000 aftershocks were experienced following the February, 2011, event.

All 31 participants experienced the initial magnitude 7.1 earthquake on 4 September 2010. 28 of these participants also experienced the more devastating magnitude 6.3

earthquake on 22 February 2011 and the prolonged aftershock sequence that followed, while three participants left their employment in the period between the two main events. The initial shock was therefore common to all participants, with a period of sustained aftershock activity common to all but three of the participants. While this extra-organisational shock was common to all participants, its impact on their decision to leave varied considerably. This variation was manifest in several ways, most notably in terms of decision speed, degree of shock impact and nature of shock impact.

With regards to decision timing, the elapsed time between the initial shock and organisational departure showed considerable variation ranging from less than a month to 18 months ($M = 11.54$, $SD = 4.90$). For example, Doris⁹ reported leaving her job within 24 hours of the February earthquake and attributed her decision directly to the shock and the impact that she perceived it to have on her organisational and personal circumstances:

So within 24 hours I'd exited Christchurch with my son..... and so that next day pretty much I'd arranged an interview at [a high school in the North Island] after having a discussion with my daughter just to say, I've got nothing to go back to, the house was munted¹⁰, the job was gone. [My son] needed to continue his schooling so I just said, "right, that's it, I have to start again". (Doris, Female, 52)

For Doris the impact of the shock on her decision to leave was direct, intense, and highly significant. She implemented her decision rapidly in the absence of any formal job search and having not secured, or even fully considered, alternative employment. In fact, this particular participant failed to officially resign or inform her employer of her decision to leave until sometime after having settled outside of the region, effectively absconding from her position. In contrast, many participants left several months after the initial shock. In these cases participants still discussed the initial shock when describing their decision to leave, but

⁹ Participant comments are used for illustrative purposes throughout Chapters 5 and 6. Comments are italicised and reported verbatim, except for the removal of identifying information. Pseudonyms replace actual names, followed by real gender and age.

¹⁰ Local slang for 'damaged beyond repair'.

more often than not attributed their leaving to the sustained and cumulative impacts of multiple shocks:

Now basically, right from the first earthquake, I wanted to leave Christchurch. I stayed there because my partner wanted to stay and everyone kept telling me, “Oh, things will get better, things will get better” and, yeah, the more they [earthquakes] happened the more I wanted to leave. There were a few big aftershocks around New Years – like I hadn’t slept and I was really tired. I was like, nah, I can’t live like this anymore. (Eleanor, Female, 27)

Eleanor’s comments are illustrative of the fact that for many participants the shock(s) had a significant and direct impact on their decision to leave. Yet, several others described the earthquake sequence as having little, or no direct impact on their decision:

The quake had no effect cos there was always the... [pause] I was going to leave when something better came anyway.... You know, there was actually no negative impact for me. I had no loss of belongings. I had no loss of family or friends. My workplace was damaged but, you know, wasn’t too major, and then all these job roles came up, and I actually made money in the end, more hours out of it all. (Alec, Male, 34)

The fact that a common extra-organisational shock impacted on the participants’ decision making in such different ways was a theme that emerged early in the data collection and analysis and was therefore pursued analytically. The ensuing analysis identified three distinct roles played by shocks, namely: 1) shocks as decision initiating mechanisms; 2) shocks leading to tipping points and final blows; and, 3) shocks as effectuation mechanisms. The analysis revealed that the role played by shock(s) varied according to the participants’ pre-shock motivational state. These are therefore briefly elaborated upon prior to discussing the role of shocks. Three pre-shock motivational states emerged during data analysis and were subsequently elevated to the level of category. These three categories and their associated properties (sub-categories) are depicted in Figure 5.1 and discussed below.

The findings indicate that, for the majority of participants, traditional antecedents of turnover, such as job dissatisfaction or organisational commitment, did not play a significant role in their decision making. Most participants described being satisfied or even highly satisfied with their jobs prior to the initial shock (n = 24), and for many this satisfaction continued up to, and was in fact still present, at the time of their leaving. Also contrary to existing turnover literature, most participants had not entertained thoughts of quitting and did not hold any specific plans for leaving prior to the initial shock. This pre-shock state was coded as '*content with the status quo*¹¹' and has properties of: job satisfaction; clear plans for staying; no prior conscious thoughts of quitting; and no prior job search behaviour. Participants who displayed this pre-shock motivational explained that they had not envisioned leaving their jobs prior to the shock(s) and held no pre-shock plans, however indeterminate, for leaving. Instead they held a strong preference to stay and were enthusiastic about their future prospects within their organisations. This pre-shock state does not, however, describe all of the study's participants.

Two additional pre-shock states were discernible in the data. The first of these, coded as '*disquiet with the status quo*', has properties of moderate job satisfaction; experiencing latent disquiet; fleeting thoughts of quitting; no specific plans for leaving; no active job search behaviour; and an underlying or latent preference for leaving. What differentiates this pre-shock state most notably from '*being content with the status quo*' is the presence of '*experiencing latent disquiet*', which has already been discussed in Chapter 4 in some detail. This state is best described as one of underlying, or latent, tension between staying and leaving and was manifest in the participants describing neither active job dissatisfaction nor very high job satisfaction, as in the case of those participants who were '*content with the status quo*'. This is not to say that these participants were ambivalent. They had just not afforded much conscious deliberation to the underlying unease or restlessness which lay mostly dormant prior to the shock(s). They reported fleeting thoughts of quitting, feelings of underutilisation of self, poor vocational fit, or being better off elsewhere, and some participants had vague or indeterminate plans for leaving at an unknown point in the future.

¹¹ Italicised text in inverted commas indicates how the concept was initially coded during data analysis.

However, these were all too often suppressed by the demands of a busy lifestyle or work schedule. While the data suggests that these participants had an underlying preference for leaving, it was weak and, as such, insufficient in motivating turnover deliberations and active job search behaviour.

The final pre-shock state was coded as '*discontent with the status quo*', and has properties of: job dissatisfaction; specific pre-existing plans for leaving; manifest thoughts of quitting; and prior job search behaviour. This pre-shock state captures those participants who described themselves as ready to leave the organisation prior to the shock(s). These participants either expressed active job dissatisfaction or the existence of plans for leaving at some point in the future. They had deliberate thoughts about quitting and in some cases clear intentions to quit which had translated into active and deliberate job search behaviour. This pre-shock motivational state corresponds most closely with the withdrawal states associated with traditional attitudinal models of employee turnover.

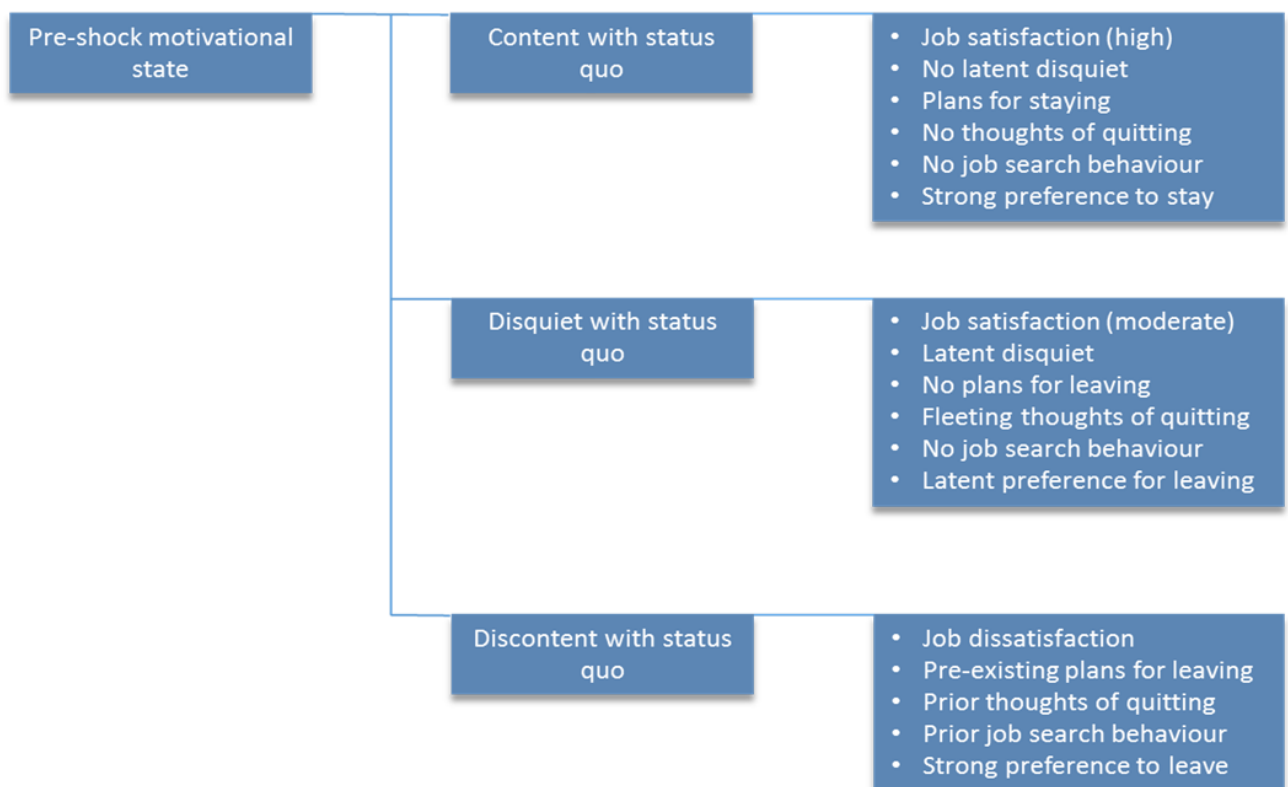


Figure 5.1. Pre-shock motivational state

Shocks as decision-initiating mechanisms

As discussed above, the majority of participants described being satisfied with their jobs prior to the shock. These participants contended that they could have happily continued to work in their organisation had the earthquake sequence not occurred:

I always found the work really interesting and it changed a lot, so that kept me engaged and there was always, you know, lots happening and lots of interesting stuff and good people to work with... I felt that I was on top of [the job] and I really enjoyed it. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

I was determined to work at [the organisation] for as long as I [pause] well, you know, well into my retirement. (Wendy, Female, 51)

And just an amazing team, I just couldn't have asked for better. I haven't actually ever worked anywhere where I have had a better team structure, better team values, and principles. There was never any issues. (Brenda, Female, 48)

I could have stayed at [the company], I suspect strongly if nothing had happened like it did I might well have stayed, because I don't know.... because something did happen. (Aubrey, Male, 52)

...I had what I considered to be the dream job, the job I had always wanted at [the company], I had it....I would say that the whole earthquake situation and the work ramifications of that were sufficiently destabilising to prompt me to think about a change that I probably wouldn't have considered before. (Harriette, Female, 54)

The above comments illustrate that for many participants the shock(s) served to initiate a decision process that ultimately led to their leaving. The last two comments, in particular, provide some initial insight into the causal mechanisms through which shocks initiate turnover decision making. Aubrey explains that he was relatively happy with his

employment situation prior to the earthquakes and that he had not entertained thoughts of leaving and held no specific plans for leaving, characteristic of a pre-shock motivational state of being '*content with the status quo*'. However, Aubrey's comment 'that something did happen' indicates that the shock(s) served to challenge or disrupt this sense of contentment; which was coded as '*disrupting the status quo*'. Harriette's comments provide a more detailed account of how shocks disrupt or challenge the status quo, and highlight two important themes commonly evidenced in the data. First, Harriette makes reference to the ramifications of the '*whole earthquake situation*', referring to the '*changes to organisational and/or personal circumstances*' brought about by the earthquakes; suggesting that it was not the impact of one isolated shock or shock consequence that served to disrupt or challenge the status quo, but rather the cumulative effect of multiple impacts. Second, Harriette explains that the earthquake situation was sufficiently destabilising to prompt her to think about leaving. This was coded as '*destabilising the individual*'. The organisational and personal changes introduced by the shock(s), and the destabilising effect these had on the participants, were commonly expressed themes which held significant weight in the emerging analysis. These codes were raised to the category level and explored analytically. At the same time the code '*changes to organisational and/or personal circumstances*' was re-coded as '*altered social context*'. These two categories are discussed more fully below.

Altered social context: Participants readily and openly discussed the impact that the earthquake sequence had on their lives, both within the workplace and their personal circumstances outside of work. These impacts, which acted as stressors, were commonly characterised as uninvited changes, largely outside of the control of the individual. Two sets of stressors were identified and coded as '*personal stressors*' and '*organisational stressors*', and constituted the properties of the higher level category of '*altered social context*'. Commonly cited personal stressors included having to attend to, and cope with, a damaged or destroyed residence; negotiating settlements with insurers and the Earthquake Commission; a diminished quality of life or lifestyle; disruption to routine or social activities; concerns regarding schooling for children; concerns about the physical and psychological wellbeing of loved ones; and frustration with day to day tasks due to damaged or destroyed

public infrastructure, roads, and community services. Illustrative examples of personal stressors are provided in the comments below:

And I think the big thing for us was where we were living, it seemed to be very close, and there were lots of earthquakes centred quite close to where we were. So things like that made it pretty tough, because you couldn't even do – as well as the sort of stress that everyone had, like your house was pretty damaged and half your street was empty and you're kind of wondering if it's ever going to get fixed. You thought, oh, well at least I'll go for a bike ride or at least I'll go for a run to feel good about myself, and you couldn't even do that because the roads were so stuffed..... Just going back to how nervous we were about the whole thing because we both knew that earthquakes shouldn't really kill you if you're standing outside on flat land, but I was sort of even starting to question that. (Barry, Male, 35)

Our house incurred much more damage in the February earthquake so it was very disheartening, as we had spent five or six years renovating the place, and I just sort of felt, you know, in the end quite unsettled. (Monique, Female, 42)

Yeah, yeah, and February was even worse so, you know, there was sort of these different worlds we were living in as far as home and work life went and you know, I was going home on a bike because, this is after February because you couldn't go by car on those roads most of the time. Even for months and months afterwards you would bike into your street and there's still these big notices, you know, residents only, it sort of felt like you were a leper going back into leper land. There was that sort of indifference as well so there was a little bit of I guess; it wasn't so much lack of empathy, but just lack of realisation. They [management] just didn't realise the stress that was all causing. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

Organisational stressors included organisational disruption and downtime; physical relocation of the business; restructuring (often described as unplanned or ill-conceived); dissolution of work teams; interpersonal conflict (most commonly as a result of a change in

supervisor or work team); and job redesign (resulting in either a sharp increase or reduction in workload).

It was really stressful, no resources, we didn't even have desks to work at, so I had to beg, borrow and steal and it would be like, I would book out a conference room for four weeks at a time and we would just set up temporary phones and stuff in there. So there were a lot of issues, because nobody had thought about the resourcing needs for this [newly established] team, they just put it together. (Raquel, Female, 48)

It was already busy and it got... [long pause] ...I mean there were times during the immediate periods after the quakes where you'd basically wake up, get up, go to work and you would be there until quite – I was doing easily 50 hour weeks plus more than 50 hour weeks for months, and its mental work a lot of it, so it was very tiring, and it was [long pause] you could never feel you were doing it all, you were always having to prioritise what you did and what you didn't do. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

So I think it must have been a good two and a half weeks after that February quake before we actually got back into work, and even then it wasn't as a whole team because we were literally spread across the city, wherever there was a space for people. So I ended up with a couple of my workmates working out of the Fendalton library. (Vincent, Male, 32)

Then when we did come back into work, our business as usual projects had been stopped, pretty much. It was all very – there was a lot of uncertainty around our budget and so we were kind of put in an office in Tuam Street and yeah, I don't think anyone really cared what we did. I mean, we were just out of the way, anyway that was what it kind of felt like. (Quinton, Male, 36)

As the above quotes indicate, the shock(s) altered the social context of all participants in a variety of ways; that is all participants experienced the shock(s) and were impacted in some way as a consequence of the shock(s). However, not all participants reported

experiencing negative stress or strain as a direct consequence of this altered social context. Interestingly, many participants reported positive changes resulting from the earthquake sequence. Most commonly these took the form of increased demand for certain job roles; unsolicited job offers; the relocation of a spouse; or the ability to spend more time with loved ones. These aspects are discussed more fully in later sections of this chapter.

Destabilising the individual: Shock-induced changes disrupt the status quo by altering the social context of an individual, which challenges the individual's sense of contentment. This has a destabilising effect prompting a reassessment of the status quo; the starting point of turnover deliberations. This destabilising effect is typified by Harriette's comment below:

I think I would have been quite happy, I'm a sort of a – I don't change a lot, so I probably would have kept on doing what I was always doing but somehow the earthquake shook me loose in some way.... I think you can always do what you have always done and assume that you will always keep doing it and then something comes along that changes absolutely everything, it changes your job, your life, your future, your family and suddenly you realise that things aren't going to be the same and I don't know, maybe it's just opens the possibility of change. Or not opens the possibility of change but determines that change will happen and you can either make what you've got fit the new circumstances or you can jump on the wave and see where it takes you.
(Harriette, Female, 54)

Open coding identified numerous ways in which the altered social context destabilised participants. These included '*surfacing latent disquiet*'; '*experiencing psychological stress and strain*'; '*being frustrated by the unknown*'; '*perceiving a loss of personal control*'; and '*altering plans for staying*' and are discussed in detail in the sections that follow.

Surfacing latent disquiet: Participants who described their pre-shock motivational state as '*disquiet with the status quo*' expressed this disquiet as latent, implying that the restlessness, unease, fleeting thoughts about leaving, and concerns they might have had about the future career were not subjected to regular conscious deliberation prior to the

shock(s), or had any behavioural manifestation. For most of these participants the primary shock (either the September or February earthquake) was significantly jarring or disorienting that it led to a '*surfacing of latent disquiet*'. Participants spoke of 'back of the mind' thoughts becoming far more salient and therefore requiring conscious deliberation:

But I knew when I went into town [as part of a USAR first response team] everything changed – changed everybody's life around me and I knew I couldn't escape those 'I need to do somethings' [latent disquiet]... It was just bang, there it was. It was like going into a 3-dimensional movie watching Avatar for the first time in your life. Whoosh, it's right in your face. That's basically how it started. (Aubrey, Male, 52)

As is evidenced in Aubrey's comment, surfacing of latent was often associated with a pressing desire to follow through with plans that were previously not actioned or given serious consideration. This was often attributed to the traumatic impact and intensity of the primary shock; a heightened sense of mortality salience; or feelings of vulnerability:

But coming into the city the next day and seeing the kind of devastation and hearing that a couple of hundred people had been killed, I thought "what am I doing here when I could be doing something else" because you never know when she's all going to be over for you. (Simon, Male 42)

So it was sort of like well, I might as well do this [pursuit of a more meaningful role/ an unanswered calling] now and just get on with this because that whole thing about life is too short... So if we are not doing what we love then it does feel like, what is the point? (Leona, Female 33)

The above comments serve to illustrate the direct role played by shocks in '*surfacing latent disquiet*'. The analysis further revealed that shocks also play an indirect role in surfacing disquiet. In this regard latent disquiet was most commonly surfaced during a period of downtime, when the participant had time available to reflect and think about their situation. This was coded as '*hiatus*' and was generally the consequence of '*organisational disruption*'

or a '*general disruption of routine*' in the altered social context following the earthquakes. The facilitating role of hiatus in surfacing disquiet is evidenced in the comment below:

...I had that time off that – those two months, and even though I was enjoying myself it did become very clear – I was [long pause] I was [pause] I felt myself change a lot....and when you distance yourself from the things that have affected you so very much, the things that you've neglected I guess over a period of time or, things you've neglected to think about or to give attention to become very – what's the word – they kind of "flood" you. (Lydia, Female 22)

For several participants the surfacing of latent disquiet was sufficient to cue a reassessment of the status quo and trigger the commencement of a process of conscious deliberation about leaving the organisation. This describes the first role of shocks as turnover decision initiating mechanisms and is depicted diagrammatically in Figure 5.2 below.

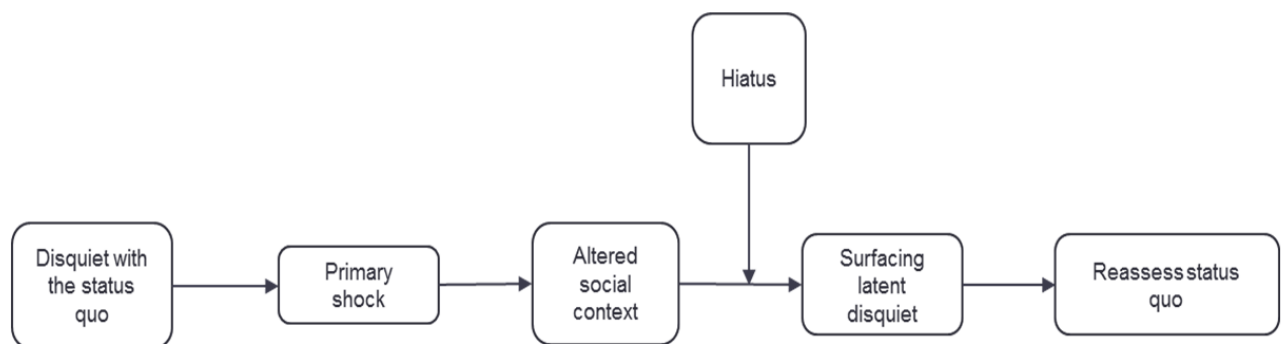


Figure 5.2. Shocks as decision-initiating mechanisms

The surfacing of latent disquiet was only one mechanism by which shocks destabilised participants. The altered social context had differential impacts on decision making speed, such that some participants were destabilised, and therefore initiated a reassessment of the status quo, more rapidly than others. The analysis revealed that the ease and speed with which the altered social context destabilised an individual varied most according to their pre-shock motivational state. Participants who described being '*disquieted with the status quo*' tended to associate their decision to leave more closely with the impact of the initial shock and its more immediate consequences. This resulted in a reassessment of the status quo

being undertaken far more rapidly compared to those participants who described their pre-shock motivational state as '*content with the status quo*'. These participants generally associated their decision to leave with the cumulative and escalating impacts of both personal and organisational stressors and the reaching of a tipping point whereby they felt a decision had to be made. The remaining mechanisms by which the altered social context destabilised participants are discussed below.

Shocks leading to tipping points and last straws

Not all participants were significantly impacted by the main large earthquakes, or experienced high levels of stress or negative stressors associated with these initial shocks. Several participants actually reported initially feeling invigorated rather than distressed; stating that they felt energised, excited and eager to contribute and help where possible, both in the workplace and the broader community during the early stages following the earthquakes. Participants did not generally associate this initial invigoration and altruism directly with their turnover decision making. Rather, it was the sustained exposure to, and inability to cope long term with, negative stressors which had a destabilising effect on participants, prompting them to eventually reassess the status quo.

Experiencing psychological stress and strain: The altered social context introduced organisational and personal stressors, resulting in many participants experiencing psychological stress and strain. These participants described elevated stress levels, feeling afraid, and being anxious, often for sustained periods. Participants who experienced sustained high levels of stress also reported that it manifested in physiological strain in the form of insomnia; fatigue; burnout; and in some cases poor immunity and prolonged illness.

Oh, it's absolutely shocking. I was just in shock. Basically, I was just on autopilot ticking off the tasks. I was dealing with my partner, who got caught and had to be pulled out by the fire brigade - I was dealing with him, he didn't want me to leave, I didn't want to leave him, I had my son up here who needed me. I was just being pulled in all different directions. (Doris, Female, 52)

Jaw tension and crying all the time. I mean I seriously got depressed and my poor partner, you know. So, to be fair, I probably ate up my fair share of ice-cream during that time. Because I just didn't care, you know? Those kind of things just went by the wayside. And so 'quake weight' was a bit of an issue for a wee while. (Raquel, Female, 48)

The other thing also was that my health had taken a real decline I would – you know, I thought it was just stress, it was more than that, there's a few doubts, so and I was struggling, just struggling even getting to work, coping and everything. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

The physical level of work just went sort of – it was like probably five-fold, honestly. And I started to get sick you know. Just time after time I was catching a cold almost every week. It was just serial you know. (Wendy, Female, 51)

The data suggested that the degree of shock-induced stress experienced varied across participants; from mild frustration and irritation with their work or personal circumstances right through to debilitating stress where individuals described being unable to function normally. Further analysis revealed that the level of negative stress experienced was congruent with the perceived acuteness and sustained or escalating nature of the organisational or personal stressor(s). These two aspects were coded as '*perceived shock impact*' and '*perceived event continuity*' respectively, and are important in understanding the role of shock-induced stressors in prompting turnover deliberations and the speed of turnover decision making. To illustrate this, and also demonstrate the use of the constant comparison method, the stories of two participants, Rosemary and Doris, are compared below.

Rosemary (Female, 56) was a senior manager in a large organisation and articulated that she was initially energised by the challenges posed by the earthquakes and felt that she could cope well with these. She perceived the initial magnitude of the event, in terms of its

direct impacts on her work and personal life, to be manageable and did not immediately consider the possibility of leaving the organisation as a result of these. However, over time organisational and personal stressors accumulated. As a result of organisational changes due to the earthquakes she was working very long hours in a more senior and complex role than her previous one, resulting in high levels of sustained job stress. At the same time she was dealing with a seriously damaged property in the residential red zone, and had also lost two very close personal friends to illness in the period leading up to her leaving, resulting in further stress and emotional strain. *"I got to Christmas and I was just absolutely whacked, you know, I mean I was really, I was pretty thin as far as emotions, just felt absolutely worn out...I knew that I'd pushed the limit as far as just resilience personally at that stage.... and I had a meeting with her [an executive coach], I think it was just a morning meeting, and I just – I actually just broke down because I just was so had it (sic)".* For Rosemary it was the cumulative and sustained exposure to stressors resulting from the altered social context, rather than her initial assessment of the primary shock, that led to her leaving. Rosemary reached a point where she was no longer able to cope with the demands being placed upon her, and therefore had to act in order to address the situation. This was a common theme for two groups of participants and was coded as *'reaching a tipping point'*. Rosemary eventually left her job 18 months after the first earthquake.

In contrast, Doris (Female, 52) left her job almost immediately following the February earthquake. She was in the Christchurch CBD, with her teenage son, when the earthquake occurred, directly exposing her to the severity of the situation. *"We saw the Grand Chancellor [hotel] on a lean, we were walking past bodies, you know, there was screaming, people were yelling, the Police and the Civil Defence were just, you know, instructing everybody to get out, just walk out, just get out of town, just move."* At the same time Doris' ex-partner and an associate were injured in the earthquake and her residence badly damaged. *"So it was virtually a split second decision.... So within 24 hours I'd exited Christchurch with my son."* For Doris the acuteness of the shock, in terms of *'perceived shock impact'*, was so severe that she sensed a need for immediate action. The use of the word *'perceived'* in labelling this code is deliberate. Many other participants, and citizens of Christchurch, would have experienced similar traumatic circumstances but did not take the same split second, and arguably less

rational, decision as Doris. The word perceived is used to indicate an assessment of impacts, rather than actual impacts.

The findings suggest that stress and strain were destabilising when an individual was unable to cope with the demands that stressors placed upon them, either as a consequence of intense stress being experienced (due to high perceived shock impact) or the escalation of stress over a sustained period (due to high perceived event continuity).

Being frustrated by the unknown: In addition to stress and strain, the altered social context further destabilised participants by introducing uncertainty, coded as '*being frustrated by the unknown*'. Many participants described being frustrated or unsettled by the uncertainty resulting from the ongoing earthquake sequence; not knowing when the aftershocks would cease or whether another large(r) earthquake event might happen:

"It was the on-going situation and that sort of growing uncertainty, and the fact that earthquake wasn't quite behaving as predicted." (Monique, Female, 42)

"We were thinking how long is this going to go on for" (Barry, Male, 35)

"The not knowing that if we kept doing this for another six months would things be okay, or would it be another year, or would it be two years." (Robby, Male, 35)

Other participants described uncertainty relating to their personal or work circumstances for example, not knowing when they might reoccupy office buildings or domestic residences; whether their insurance claims might be settled; or whether their jobs were secure or at risk:

"I was out there [in a temporary office location] for about four months and every week I was asking, "Do I still have a job? Is there still going to be [department]? What's going to happen?" I couldn't get a straight answer." (Raquel, Female, 48)

"It was just so uncertain living there, you sort of – you couldn't quite get on with everyday life because – I guess you just weren't ever really sure of what was happening" (Bethany, Female, 28)

Perceived loss of personal control: Participants who reported experiencing high levels of uncertainty generally also associated this with a sense of loss of personal control, coded as *'perceived loss of personal control'*. In this regard participants expressed feeling that they were unable to fully control the trajectory or outcomes of their personal and/or work circumstances *"....it was the total loss of control and autonomy or independence for me that all these [long pause] I was being moved like a chess piece, I was a pawn on a chess board"* (Raquel, Female, 48); or that they were not as in control of their lives as they had been prior to the earthquakes *"...in my personal life I realised that I wasn't as in control of everything as I thought I was, simply because the force of nature was something that can't be controlled and I definitely at that point realised that I simply wasn't as strong as I thought I was."* (Gordon, Male, 29)

Altered plans for staying: The altered social context further served to destabilise participants by directly impacting on future career plans or general life plans, such as staying in the region, buying a first home, or starting a family; this was coded as *"altered plans for staying"*. As mentioned previously, most of the participants who, prior to the earthquakes, were highly satisfied in their roles held no specific intentions or plans for leaving, i.e. their pre-shock motivational state was assessed as being content with the status quo. Many of these participants held quite specific plans for staying, or at least a clear idea of how they saw their career or personal lives progressing in the future, prior to the shock(s). Changes to organisational and/or personal circumstances either cast doubt over such plans, or more directly altered a plan for staying or rendered it unfeasible.

So the plan was that [spouse] would support us both while I worked and studied and then we would switch around once I was qualified. We were looking to start a family. So to that end we were actually being quite organised. We were in the middle of buying a house when the earthquake struck. We were, I think two days, from being financially

obligated to go ahead.... So [spouse's] job was instantly thrown into doubt and instantly her hours got cut... So the house sale fell through. (Robby, Male, 35)

Robby's comment illustrates how shock-induced changes to organisational or personal circumstances have a direct impact on a pre-planned course of action for the future, both in terms of the participant's career and his personal life plans. In addition to the direct impact these changes had on existing plans for staying, they also generated uncertainty and considerable stress and strain for the participant and his spouse. Despite the participant describing himself as content with the status quo prior to the shock, the combined and cumulative impacts of shock-induced changes were ultimately destabilising enough to warrant a reassessment of the status quo and initiate conscious deliberation about leaving.

The above discussion served to illustrate the role played by shocks in destabilising individuals whose pre-shock motivational state was one of contentment with the status quo. These participants were satisfied with their jobs and often well embedded in their organisation or community, as such they expressed a strong preference for staying prior to the shock(s). These factors appeared to buffer the impact of the initial shock(s) such that the altered social context did not lead to immediate destabilisation and a reassessment of the status quo. Rather, for several participants, their first reaction was a positive attempt to return to the pre-shock status quo in order to preserve their plans for staying and to return to a state of contentment; this was coded as '*restoring the status quo*':

"Because I remember very clearly our original intention was to try and stay at all costs really....we focussed on, okay how can we make this work without it changing things [career and general life plans]?" Robby (Male, 35)

Despite this initial positive response to the primary shock many participants described eventually succumbing to the cumulative and sustained impact of multiple stressors arising from the altered social context. These participants cited repeated attempts at restoring the status quo through attending to demands imposed by shock-induced changes. Such attempts were often unsuccessful or when successful were negated by subsequent shocks. Repeated

unsuccessful attempts at restoring the status quo served to further increase psychological stress and strain and reduce the resolve and energy of participants. Diminished psychological and physical resources attenuated the ability of the participants to cope with the demands being imposed upon them by the altered social context. This led to escalating discontent with the status quo across both work and general life domains. Participants described eventually reaching a point where the status quo became untenable, thus requiring reassessment or immediate action in order to regain a sense of control over their circumstances. As stated earlier, this was coded as *'reaching a tipping point'* and was a theme strongly evidenced in the data for all participants whose pre-shock motivational state was one of *'content with the status quo'*. Several participant comments are included below to illustrate the tipping point concept.

"I think we probably initially viewed it [the September 2010 earthquake] as "oh, wasn't that an interesting life experience and so on and so forth", "what a one off event that was I'll never forget etc." But, obviously, you know, there was aftershock after aftershock after aftershock, and I think the actual tipping point came on February the 22nd, but I guess in fairness that was almost a culmination of the previous five or six months aftershocks and then, you know, with the severity of February the 22nd that was the tipping point, particularly with my wife. (Leonard, Male, 45)

And the situation in my family was going from bad to worse since the earthquakes. My parent's home was damaged and we had to sort of dig the house out... it was like the whole of Christchurch was in chaos. And then on top of this my father was diagnosed with dementia, which of course, sort of was [long pause] I think everybody had got so stressed that every sort of weak link just broke... it was just too much and one day I just felt like – you know I just couldn't carry on any more. I was sort of thinking that that's it. I just can't do it [cope] anymore. (Wendy, Female, 51)

In the end the job started gobbling up so much of my time and any energy I had, so I was running out of energy for my kids and I didn't want [pause] and my husband

[pause] *and it was just, it was not good... And it was sort of at that point that I threw in the towel.* (Jillian, Female, 36)

I think we started really to feel bit more positive about it, then there was a bad earthquake in April and then there were obviously lots of earthquakes, but those ones in July were pretty grim.... my partner pretty much burnt out... then July came along and we just sort of folded really, you know. (Barry, Male, 35)

I started trying to project manage [a house build] as well as work and I got to September and I said, "I can't do this anymore, I'm about to have a breakdown" sort of thing, you know. (Colby, Male, 50)

All those sorts of things that started niggling, you know, or adding up to that tipping point and then having to deal with relocating a [whole department]... I never really gave it [leaving] a thought, at least not going out of my way to actively seek employment, so really for me it was until, wasn't until I hit that tipping point. (Annie, Female, 46)

'Reaching a tipping point' was generally associated with high 'perceived event continuity' and/or high 'perceived shock impact'. The above comments also illustrate that, although described in similar ways by participants, different factors in the altered social context contributed to participants reaching a tipping point. In this respect, participants associated 'reaching a tipping point' with 'feeling overwhelmed'; 'perceived loss of personal control'; 'being frustrated by the unknown'; 'feeling unable to cope'; and 'feeling compelled to act'. The analysis further revealed that reaching a tipping point held different implications for different groups of participants.

For one group of participants, the reaching of a tipping point was able to be recognised and therefore acted upon. That is to say participants became aware of the fact that the status quo had become untenable and needed reassessing. This is illustrated in the comment below:

And it was then that I just... [long pause] ...we talked through what are the options, and she [an executive coach] said, "Well, there's lots of other options." And I thought, "Well, I can either ignore that and carry on [trying to cope with the situation] or I can take that to heart, and sort of think about that really seriously. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

Upon reaching a tipping point, participants such as Rosemary were able to successfully engage in a meaningful reassessment of the status quo and subsequently identify leaving their employment as a potential strategy for coping with demands imposed by the altered social context. This commonly signified the starting point of a process of conscious deliberation about leaving. The analysis identified a number of facilitating conditions that appeared to enable this group of participants to successfully engage in a reassessment of the status quo. The first such condition was '*social support*' and is highlighted in Rosemary's comment above. In Rosemary's case, it was the intervention of an executive coach which eventually led her to recognise that she had reached a tipping point (contrast this with VB1 and CA2). For other participants '*social support*' came from a spouse or close family members:

"I was like, nah, I can't live like this ...so I sat down with my family and we talked about it, and yeah, we decided right I'll go sort myself first." (Eleanor, Female, 27)

This group of participants commonly described their decision to leave as a collective decision-making process, rather than an isolated or individual decision. This was evidenced by the strong use of 'we' or 'our thinking/decision' throughout an interview and was coded as '*Decision locus – collective*'. The importance of decision locus is explicated in later sections of this chapter.

A second facilitating condition was '*hiatus*'. Although conceptually similar to hiatus stemming from organisational disruption that was discussed in earlier sections, the hiatus referred to here was often self-imposed, rather than an immediate consequence of organisational disruption. Participants described deliberate efforts to remove themselves from the situation in order to engage in a meaningful reassessment of the status quo:

“I think it [hiatus] just gave me time to face myself and realise the stress I was in and I just didn’t feel I could face at least the work part of my life.” (Wendy, Female, 51)

Participants who expressed a high level of social support and a collective decision locus, and/or were able to temporarily remove themselves from the post-crisis situation, were better equipped to identify that a tipping point had been reached and that action needed to be taken in order to maintain control and avoid being metaphorically ‘forced over the edge’ and completely succumbing to their circumstances. The role of shocks in reaching a tipping point is depicted in Figure 5.3 below.

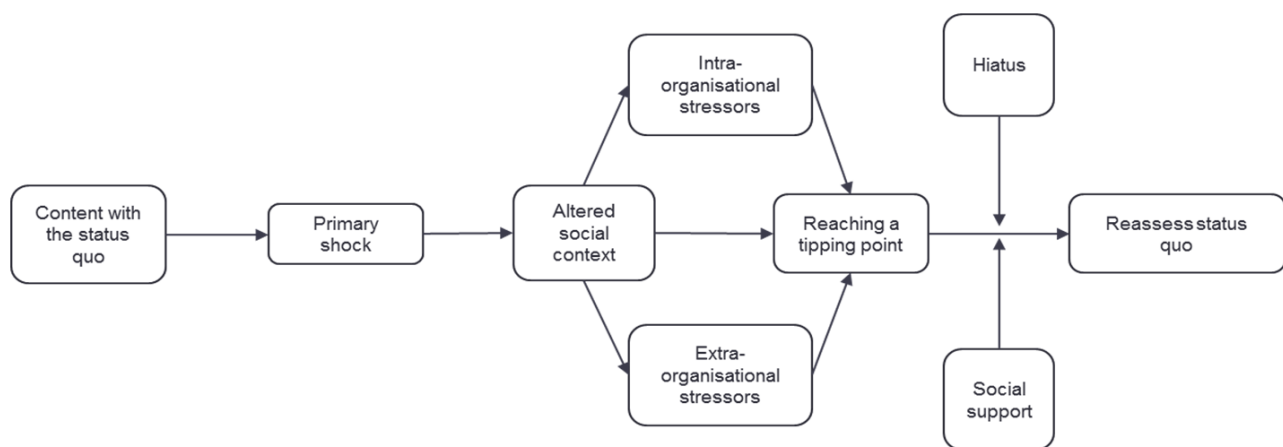


Figure 5.3. Shocks leading to a tipping point and reassessment of the status quo

A second group of participants, who also described ‘*reaching a tipping point*’, failed at the time to recognise that a tipping point had in fact been reached and that action needed to be taken in order to engage in a meaningful reassessment of the status quo. Instead, they attempted repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, to cope with stressors imposed by the altered social context. All participants in this group described experiencing considerable personal and organisational stressors (*perceived shock impact - high*) and a high level of psychological and/or physiological stress and strain. Additionally, they were all able to identify a specific secondary shock which directly impacted upon their decision to leave. Most commonly this took the form of interpersonal conflict at work brought about as a consequence of reorganisation or restructuring following the earthquakes.

Failure to recognise that a tipping point had been reached and to initiate a meaningful reassessment of the status quo, resulted in the participants becoming trapped in cycles of unsuccessful coping behaviour (*perceived event continuity – high*). Over time this greatly diminished their resources for coping with the demands being imposed upon them by the altered social context, such that a relatively benign shock served as the watershed which pushed participants over the tipping point and ultimately led to their leaving; coded as '*last straw shock*'. This is evidenced in Brenda's comments:

So she came in and she said that she didn't want those pieces of paper up there [on a notice board] like she'd previously told me...and it wasn't the worst thing she'd ever said, but it was the final straw...I breathed a bit and then adrenalin just flooded me with indignation and I just thought a few choice words. I went downstairs found an office that was empty, opened up my email, and typed out my resignation letter. I was absolutely shaking with adrenalin. I went to [the operations manager] and I handed it [resignation letter] to him, which I had signed, and he read it and he said "do you want to talk?" and I so said "no, I don't want to talk, I'm just going to pack up my stuff, I'm going to pack up everything that I can right now and I'll be gone, I'll come back and get the rest of it later". He [the operations manager] thought it [the situation] was all right. The only reason he thought it was all right is because I was working so bloody hard to make it look like it was working... so it broke my heart. It totally broke my heart. I had waited a year for my job, to do what I love and do well and give back to the [specific] community again and it was stolen from me basically. (Brenda, Female, 48)

In failing to engage in a meaningful reassessment of the status quo once a tipping point had been reached, Brenda reacted strongly to what could be considered a relatively benign shock, i.e. being reprimanded over pieces of paper on a noticeboard. She resigned almost immediately following this '*last straw shock*' in the absence of any consideration of, or search for, alternative employment. Brenda's story was difficult for her to share and evoked significant emotion when recalling parts of it, particularly when discussing how she reached a point where leaving was perceived to be the only viable option for coping with her situation. As such she associated a high degree of emotional strain and regret with her decision:

I didn't feel good about it, but it was sink or swim for me and I said to [the operational manager], nobody else is going to do this for me. Nobody is there for me. Nobody else has stood up for me. I'm the only one that can do this and I have to do this and I have to do it today. (Brenda, Female, 48)

Although Brenda's reaction may appear extreme, other participants who described being pushed beyond a tipping point by a '*last straw shock*' cited similar reactions and emotions. Within this group of participants several factors appeared to inhibit the ability to recognise the nearing of a tipping point and engage in a reassessment of the status quo. The first of these was coded as '*strong attachment to the pre-shock status quo*'. In this regard, participants explained that they were highly satisfied with their jobs prior to the earthquake and that their role was of significant personal importance to them and of perceived importance to their organisations; "*I had a continuous employment history of about 38 years... I had been at that particular office for exactly 20 years to the day of the earthquake. It [leaving] wasn't on the agenda in the slightest, I mean, I loved my job I absolutely loved it because I got to meet all these interesting people from all around the world*" (Estelle, Female, 57). Several participants also described deep and meaningful working relationships or being part of a close team of colleagues whose support and companionship was highly valued; "*It was a really fantastic team... just the most incredible communication and support for each other*" (Brenda, Female, 48). As a consequence participants held a favourable disposition towards their job. However, intra-organisational changes, particularly reorganisation or restructuring, served to disrupt important social networks and challenge this disposition, which participants experienced as highly unsettling. Their '*strong attachment to the pre-shock status quo*' made accepting these changes very difficult. This was coded as '*having difficulty letting go*' and is evidenced by Raquel (Female, 48):

I loved what I did and I knew we were doing a good job and I wanted to see it through, and so, I was like, there's a certain amount of pride that, "I'm not gonna let that bastard [her new manager] run me out."

A second factor that inhibited participants engaging in an effective reassessment of the status quo was '*lack of social support*'. Unlike the group of participants discussed in the preceding section, who made strong reference to 'we' or 'our' when explaining their decision making, the group of participants in question here reported feeling very isolated and alone in their decision making. This is evidenced in Brenda's earlier comment that "*Nobody is there for me... I'm the only one who can do this*" and was coded as '*Decision Locus – Individual*'. Whereas the previous group of participants had actively sought out the opinions or counsel of a spouse, family members, or colleagues and involved them in their decision making, this was not the case here with some participants characterising their experience as a very personal battle. Such social isolation was most often the result of the disruption to social networks discussed above. The relocation or resignation of close colleagues was a direct cause of distress for participants, but at the same time it diminished an important resource participants had for coping with the demands being placed upon them by the altered social context; this was coded as '*deterioration of social support*'. The analysis further suggested that the timing of social support deterioration was of importance. Participants reported transitioning from a high level of social support immediately following the primary shock, to very low levels of social support at the time of making the decision to leave. Furthermore, social support deterioration often coincided with a reduction in other coping resources (for example time and energy) in the midst of escalating demands being imposed by the altered social context. This increased the level of stress and strain experienced by participants, and made them more vulnerable to a '*last straw shock*'. This was compounded by a third and final factor that inhibited participants engaging in an effective reassessment of the status quo, namely an '*absence of hiatus*'.

All of the participants who described being pushed over a tipping point, left their jobs relatively long after the initial shock ($M = 15.8$ months, $SD = 5.67$). Despite the long period of time between the initial shock and leaving, none of these participants reported having a period of hiatus during which they were able to remove themselves from the situation and engage in a meaningful reassessment of the status quo. Often this was attributed to increased workloads resulting from intra-organisational change:

I have never worked so hard in my life as I had in the seven months following the earthquake. There were queues to the door constantly, you never got away from the counter. (Estelle, Female, 57).

I was working 16 - 17 hour days at that time. I hadn't any time off, including weekends.... and you just didn't have a break and, to be honest with you, it kind of never went away... but I loved it. Oh, it was [pause] we were doing such a good job. It was just a blast, it was fun, there was a whole bunch of people, we were all getting together to try and get the city back up and operational. (Raquel, Female, 48).

Additionally, as illustrated in Raquel's comment above, altruistic attempts to contribute to the post-crisis recovery and a '*strong attachment to the pre-shock status quo*', often inhibited self-imposing a period of hiatus.

The role of shocks as final blows is depicted in Figure 5.4 below. To summarise, the analysis suggested, that when faced with escalating stressors, a '*strong attachment to the pre-shock status quo*', '*lack of social support*', and '*absence of hiatus*' resulted in participants being overwhelmed by the demands placed on them in the altered social context. This inhibited the recognition of '*reaching a tipping point*' and resulted in failure to engage in a meaningful '*reassessment of the status quo*'. Consequentially participants were pushed beyond the tipping point by a '*last straw shock*', culminating in the rapid execution of a decision to leave the organisation.



Figure 5.4. Shocks as last straws.

Shocks as effectuation mechanisms

The preceding sections illustrate an important role played by shocks in initiating turnover decision making, either through the surfacing of latent disquiet or through cumulative impacts in the altered social context leading to a tipping point being reached. While shocks served to trigger turnover deliberations for most participants in the study, this was not the case for all participants. Rather, for one group of participants the shock(s) acted as an effectuation mechanism, enabling them to execute a decision that had, in many cases, largely already been made, but not yet executed. Pre-shock motivational states were again important in understanding the role of shocks as effectuation mechanisms. In this regard participants who described their pre-shock motivational state as '*discontent with the status quo*' had already deliberated leaving their jobs, and often described being mentally ready to leave the organisation, prior to the earthquake sequence commencing. As is evidenced in comments below, this readiness to leave often stemmed from dissatisfaction with the job or organisational life in general:

There was [sic] a lot of things I wasn't satisfied with, for instance the job roles and the people I was with.... and it was always if the perfect job role came up I would have jumped at the chance... I was always looking but you've got to get the right role... I always had the plan [to make a career switch into teaching] there... It's been like 12 years now, this whole plan's been in the making... But I knew that I had to look after myself financially, and even mentally... But I also knew I couldn't stay down the bottom for my own sanity as well. (Alec, Male, 34)

I wasn't as happy working for [the organisation] as I have been in other organisations... So, yeah, so I wasn't happy about where I was but, you know, it was a decision that I made to ensure that we continued to pay a mortgage. I didn't feel that I had built meaningful relationships with people while I worked there. (Quinton, Male, 36)

In addition to job dissatisfaction, feeling '*discontent with the status quo*' was often evidenced through participants '*having pre-existing plans for leaving*':

So I never actually had a definite point when I was going to leave, it was always, "When a teaching position comes up for teaching aiding, or a role that works with kids came up that was when I was going to go". And those jobs in Canterbury were very scarce as it is, and they have been for the last number of years. So it was always like, just wait for that opportunity to come up, because I was applying for jobs. They just weren't [pause] weren't coming. (Alec, Male, 34)

I was in that stage of my life that – yeah, I was gonna – I had intended on leaving, I hadn't intended on staying, had it [the earthquake] been sooner or later things may have panned out differently. (Bernice, Female, 23)

'*Experiencing job dissatisfaction*', as well as '*having pre-existing plans for leaving*', are properties of the higher order category of '*being discontent with the status quo*'. The analysis revealed, however, that discontentment with the status quo extended beyond individual job dissatisfaction as it is traditionally conceptualised in the turnover (and related) literatures. The data suggested that being discontent with the status quo was not exclusively connected to organisational life, but could derive from factors in both work and non-work life domains. Although not expressed in the comment above, Bernice's discontent with the status quo stems from the fact that she finds herself in a role not related to what she is studying. Alec is felt that he was not pursuing his true calling of working with children, while Quinton felt that his skillset was being underutilised by his organisation. Other participants associated their feelings of '*discontent with the status quo*' with low perceived role importance or role permanence. The analysis also showed that being '*discontent with the status quo*' could be experienced either individually (as in the case of Alec and Bernice above) or more collectively as evidenced in Bethany's comments below.

It probably wasn't really a decision to leave [the organisation] as such, it was more a decision to leave Christchurch. Our decision was based around a few things. I'd been

looking for teaching, full-time teaching jobs for, ah, probably nearly nine, ten months – and those opportunities just never came up, in terms of full-time positions. Another reason was that my partner wasn't hugely happy in his job in Christchurch. It was a really small company and there was not much room for him to progress. And then probably a third reason why we left and specifically why we moved to Wellington was that this is where I am originally from and we had, well, my mum lives here, um, and it was – I'd never lived in Christchurch until those two years, so it was almost kind of only going to be a temporary measure. (Bethany, Female, 31)

Bethany's comments indicate that her discontentment with the status quo did not stem directly from dissatisfaction with her job, the organisation or work relations; *"I really loved the work and liked the people I worked with... so it really had nothing to do with anything [the organisation] had done wrong or that I didn't want my job there"*, (Bethany, Female, 31). Rather, her discontent is the result of a combination of a pre-existing plan for leaving in order to pursue a more meaningful career in teaching, her partner's dissatisfaction with his job, and their collective unease with living in Christchurch both prior to and following the earthquakes having failed to fully settle there as relatively new migrants.

Participants whose pre-shock motivational state was one of feeling *'discontent with the status quo'* explained that the primary shock (earthquake) did not initiate their process of turnover decision making, and was also not considered to be the main cause of their decision to leave. Rather, the shock(s) served to enable or expedite the execution a decision to leave, this was coded as *'shocks as effectuation mechanisms'*. The choice of the term 'effectuation' was deliberate as it implies 'bringing into force or operation; to execute or carry out'. The analysis revealed two dominant means by which shock(s) altered the social context and in doing so enabled leaving for these participants. First, the shock(s) brought about significant *'changes in the local labour market'*, altering both the supply of, and demand for, labour. Such changes in the local labour market provided opportunities for leaving that had previously not existed for participants. In this respect, several participants noted that their pre-existing plans for leaving had been in place for a prolonged period prior to the earthquakes. These participants explained that they had made repeated attempts at enacting their plans for

leaving (through active job search behaviour), but that these attempts had been unsuccessful due to the low availability of suitable alternative employment opportunities. One example of this is evidenced in the construction sector. Following the earthquakes, rapid and significant growth was experienced in the sector as a result of commercial and residential rebuild activity. This resulted in the creation of new organisations and/or roles in construction-related industries that had not existed prior to the earthquakes, effectively reversing a trend of declining job growth which had been pervasive in the industry in the decade preceding the earthquakes (MBIE, 2015). A similar, although less-sustained, trend was seen in the education sector. This increased demand for labour in certain industries or professions enabled a number of participants to enact pre-existing plans for leaving that they had previously been unable to enact prior to the shock(s) due to the low availability of job openings. This is well-illustrated in Alec's comments below:

....Basically kids and education was my [pause] where I really wanted to be, and it came down to last year, after the quake, funding came through the Ministry [of Education] for more teacher aides to go into schools, and then that gave me a role into a school. That funding came through because – for stress control, all the kids were stressed and needed extra handling, and the teachers couldn't handle the overall pressure, so the Ministry threw out some money for six months to get more people in the classrooms to help out. You know, there was actually no negative impact [from the earthquakes] for me. I had no loss of belongings, I had no loss of family or friends, workplace was damaged but, you know, wasn't too major, and then all these job roles came up, and I actually made money in the end. (Alec, Male, 34)

In a similar manner, increased demand for labour in certain sectors made it easier for already dissatisfied employees to find alternative employment and therefore execute affect-driven decisions to leave, as in the case of Quinton:

So how the earthquake then came to affect my decision making at that point was that work suddenly became much more available to suit people with my skill set [as a land engineer]... And so I began to use my contacts to say well, I'm now looking for work,

which came easily. I very much wanted to be involved in the rebuild of Christchurch. It was sort of something I saw as being a great opportunity for our generation, my generation to be involved in. So I sought out companies that I knew that were going to be part of that alliance and went about finding a position within that – within SCIRT [an alliance company formed post-earthquake to rebuild the horizontal infrastructure in the city]. And that's one of the better decisions I've made, career wise. (Quinton, Male, 36)

The second means by which shock(s) enabled leaving was through the erosion of organisational and community embeddedness. As with previous groups of participants the altered social context exerted a destabilising influence on participants and diminished their overall sense of attachment to either their organisation or Christchurch as a city. This was coded as '*deterioration of embeddedness*' and in turn served to catalyse leaving by either '*expediting the enactment of pre-existing plans for leaving*' or '*reducing the decision strain*' associated with enacting such plans, or alternatively, accepting unsolicited job offers. This is evidenced in the comments below.

It [the earthquake] gave us more of a reason to leave Christchurch than there would've been if the earthquakes hadn't happened... we did leave earlier than we might have otherwise. (Bethany, Female, 31)

The decision to leave had already been made but they [earthquakes] made leaving much easier and far less of a wrench. It really confirmed the correctness of our decision to leave... the earthquakes certainly made leaving easier. (Stella, Female, 55)

I was, at the time, living with my parents because my flat had kind of broken up after the earthquake. The job opportunities weren't great and everyone spoke about the earthquakes all the time, and I was just tired of it. I was over living in Christchurch. So I was approached by [unsolicited job offer by a premier sports team] and I went through the interview process and then got the job over here in Australia, so it was a very easy decision to make as I wasn't sure what the next step was going to be in

Christchurch as there wasn't much to offer for me in my role with my expertise. So I guess it was really easy for me just to cut strings and move to Sydney. (Robin, Female, 28)

In summary, the preceding section discussed the mechanisms through which shocks act as decision effectuation mechanisms. In this regard the shock(s) effectuated leaving by altering the local labour market and/or eroding organisational and community embeddedness thus enabling, and often expediting, a mostly predetermined decision to leave. The pre-determined nature of the decision to leave was the result of participants being already discontent with the status quo prior to the shock sequence commencing. This process is depicted in Figure 5.5.

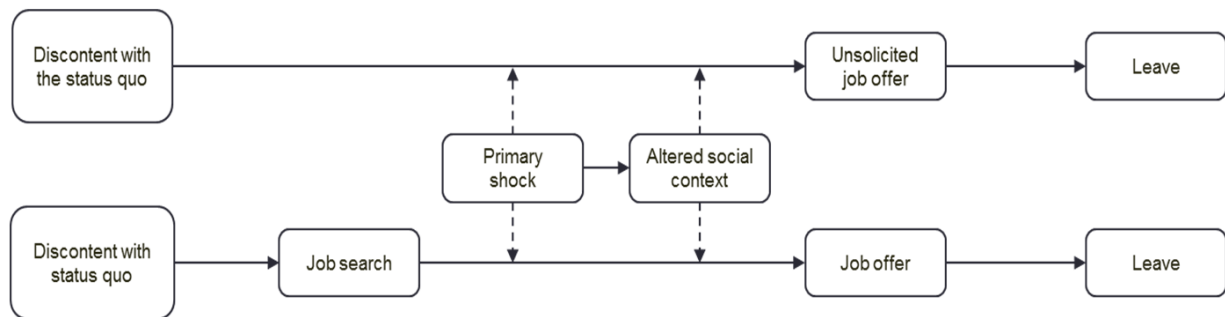


Figure 5.5. Shocks as effectuation mechanisms.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented part one of the main findings of the study as they emerged from the data analysis. Specific focus was placed on understanding the role of shocks in turnover decision making. The analysis revealed that although the earthquake sequence was common to all participants, the impact of this commonly-experienced extra-organisational shock on their turnover decision making was varied. Three distinct shock roles were identified and discussed, namely 1) shocks as decision initiating mechanisms; 2) shocks leading to tipping points and last straws; and 3) shocks as effectuation mechanisms. The findings also suggest that one's response to shock(s) varies according to pre-shock motivational state. Part two of the research findings are presented in Chapter 6 which follows. In this chapter the discussion now shifts to understanding the nature of the turnover decision-making processes engaged in by participants.

CHAPTER 6

Research Findings: Part 2

Deconstructing decisions: Rational choice vis-a-vis critical reflection

INTRODUCTION

Part two of the research findings are presented in this chapter which focuses specifically on the nature of the turnover decision-making processes described by participants. The chapter commences by distinguishing between two main forms of decision making; namely a rational choice between known alternatives and the more complex process of engaging in critical reflection. From here, engaging in critical reflection is identified as the core category to emerge from the analysis. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to explicating the factors that necessitate engaging in critical reflection, the nature of the process itself, and finally the consequences of engaging in critical reflection. The chapter concludes with the observation that not all turnover decision making involves engaging in process of critical reflection and that the heterogeneity of turnover decisions can be accounted for by several important contextual factors.

RATIONAL CHOICE AS A SUFFICIENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Through the use of the constant comparative method, the analysis revealed a number of important differences in the decision-making processes of participants. One of the more conspicuous differences to emerge early in the analysis related to the degree of difficulty that participants associated with their decision to leave, with the greatest variation evident between participants who were '*discontent with status quo*' and those who were either '*content with the status quo*' or felt '*disquiet with the status quo*'. Participants who were already '*discontent with the status quo*' prior to the earthquake sequence (n = 8) typically viewed leaving as a desirable outcome and described their decision to leave in very positive terms:

I mean it's a silver lining of the earthquake the fact that I've come to Australia and am having a fantastic experience working for a [premier sports] team. (Robin, Female, 28)

I could finally see the light in the tunnel. I knew I had money coming and that was great and there was a bit of a relief going, "Right, I finally don't have to work with some of those people". I don't have to do the stupid early hours or the late nights ever again.
(Alec, Male, 34)

For these participants the turnover decision-making process was characterised as straightforward, and thus not requiring much conscious deliberation or deep contemplation. For example, Robin noted that her decision was *"a black and white decision"*; *"a very easy decision to make"*; and *"a no-brainer"*. The terms used by Robin to describe her decision are telling as they reflect key aspects of the decision-making process for this group of leavers. First, the statement that it was 'a black and white decision' refers to the fact that her decision making principally entailed a rational choice between two or more known, and oftentimes pre-determined, alternatives. In this regard *'engaging in active job search behaviour'* formed an integral part of the decision-making process for almost all (7 out of 8) participants in this group. The remaining participant received an unsolicited job offer that was deemed to be highly attractive. Moreover, six out of the eight participants had secured alternative employment prior to leaving their organisation, and all were in meaningful employment at the time of data collection.

The second statement by Robin that it was 'a very easy decision to make' is indicative of the fact that, for this group of participants, their decision to leave their job was not associated with significant decision strain or negative emotion. This stemmed in part from the fact that, being already *'discontent with status quo'*, participants viewed leaving as a desirable and necessary outcome, for addressing their dissatisfaction or advancing pre-existing life plans. Importantly, the analysis revealed that the degree of *'decision difficulty'* participants associated with their decisions varied according to *'perceived decision magnitude'*, *'perceived decision control'*, and *'decision locus'*. With respect to *'perceived decision magnitude'* most participants in this group held a transactional, or instrumental (Macky, 2013), disposition towards their employment. None of these participants expressed feeling that they were in their ideal job or were part of a great team, as was the case with participants who were highly content with the status quo. Additionally, several participants reported their jobs as having

relatively low *'role importance'* or *'role tenure'*. Leaving therefore involved minimal sacrifice in terms of career trajectory or established interpersonal relations.

In respect to *'perceived decision control'* all of the participants in this group articulated that they left on their own terms and felt no exogenous compulsion to make the decision to leave. Participants contended that they could have stayed had they chosen to do so. This is stark contrast to those participants described in earlier sections, who reached a tipping point where they felt compelled to take action in order to cope with their situation. In terms of *'decision locus'* most participants (six out of eight) framed their decision as an individual decision, directed primarily at leaving the organisation rather than the broader post-crisis situation. The analysis showed that decisions not impacted by, or impacting upon, significant others were associated with much lower decision difficulty:

I didn't have any commitments in Christchurch other than some family and friends, and obviously I didn't have children or a partner that I had to consider, so I guess I was really easy for me. (Robin, Female, 28)

I'm just going to say it, and it probably sounds kind of almost a bit selfish, but I didn't really factor anyone else into my decision making because I find it complicates things a bit. So I'd think about them [family and friends] but I didn't include them in my decision making. (James, Male, 22)

Robin's final comment that her decision to leave was a *'no brainer'* reflects perhaps the most significant difference between the decision-making processes of the various groups of participants. The comment suggests that the straightforward nature of the decision, involving a binary choice between two alternatives, obviated the need for much conscious deliberation beyond the consideration of these known alternatives. Being already *'discontent with the status quo'* meant that this group of participants held a strong preference for leaving. To this end, most participants in this group explained that the decision to leave their jobs had crystallised quite some time prior to the earthquakes, with the shock(s) merely effectuating the physical act of quitting. The data revealed that, for this group of participants, having

already psychologically detached from the organisation, '*a rational choice between known alternatives*' sufficed as the core decision-making process. Such a rational choice between known alternatives, preceded by job dissatisfaction or a script for leaving, largely mirrors how turnover decision-making has been portrayed by extant theory and turnover models (Hom et al., 2012). As noted in Chapter 2, however, traditional attitudinal path models seldom explain more than 25% of turnover variance (Hom et al., 2012). Coincidentally, only eight of the 31 participants in the present study, or 26%, are captured by this 'traditional' model of the turnover decision-making process. The analysis of decision-making processes of the remaining groups of participants revealed a far more complex, strained and nuanced decision process.

CRITICAL REFLECTION AS A CORE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The above discussion highlights that participants who were '*discontent with the status quo*' had already psychologically detached from their organisations prior to the shock(s), thus displaying a high degree of psychological readiness for change. The analysis suggests that this nullified the need for a post-shock '*reassessment of the status quo*'. In contrast, participants who felt some '*disquiet with the status quo*' or were highly '*content with the status quo*' held a clear preference for staying prior to the earthquakes. Several participants described a strong sense of psychological attachment to the pre-shock status quo. For these participants (n = 23) '*a rational choice between known alternatives*' did not feature as the core decision-making process. In fact, only eight of these participants had an offer in hand upon leaving their organisations and the majority had not engaged in active job search behaviour either prior to, or after, the shock(s). Those few participants who did undertake a job search, and subsequent weighing of alternatives, described doing so only after their decision to leave had crystallised. This leads to the important inference that turnover decision making consists of separate phases of detachment and effectuation. As the effectuation phase has been discussed in the preceding section, attention is now directed at explaining how '*engaging in critical reflection*' enabled a '*detaching from the status quo*' that resulted in participants transitioning from a pre-shock preference for staying to ultimately one of leaving.

The emergence of *'engaging in critical reflection'* as the core category in the analysis has been discussed in Chapter 4. Focus is thus now directed at understanding the decision characteristics that necessitate engaging in critical reflection, the nature of the critical reflection process described by participants, the consequences of engaging in critical reflection in terms of *'detaching from the status quo'*.

Decision properties necessitating engaging in critical reflection

Participants who were coded as having engaged in a process of critical reflection (n = 17) reported a much higher degree of decision difficulty and strain than participants who were already discontent with the status quo. As with previous participants, the degree of *'decision difficulty'* varied according to *'perceived decision magnitude'*, *'perceived decision control'*, and *'decision locus'*. With respect to *'perceived decision magnitude'* most of the participants who engaged in critical reflection characterised their decision to leave as a significant life decision and one that was therefore not taken lightly. This high *'perceived decision magnitude'* was attributed, in part, to high *'role importance'* (evidenced in Rosemary's comment below); high *'role tenure'* (evidenced in Jillian's comment below); and/or the fact that the participant was the primary bread-winner for a family:

I went back thinking I'm needed here, I need to keep going for Christchurch, I can't really abandon them [the citizens of Christchurch] now. My husband said to me, "That's just typical, just stop for a moment, give yourself a day or two, you don't have to go back into work, there's enough people doing [earthquake recovery management], give yourself a break," and I said "No, it's my job, this is what I'm paid to do," and I went in... (Rosemary, Female, 56)

I worked with the [particular department] for over 17 years, I'd worked there since I finished high school, you know since I graduated university, I'd been there, you know, my whole working career. (Jillian, Female, 36)

Other participants noted that '*perceived decision magnitude*' was high because their decision centred, not so much on leaving their specific job or organisation, but more broadly on facilitating important life plans or leaving the post-crisis situation and the city of Christchurch. In this regard the 10 of the 17 participants left the city, relocating to either elsewhere in New Zealand or abroad. The broader scope and reach of these decisions served to raise both the level of complexity and importance attached to the decision making, thus necessitating a more comprehensive decision process.

But it was not the organisation, I have to say Russell, it was not the organisation we were leaving. (Leonard, Male, 45)

I mean [the decision to leave] wasn't just to do with work, it was to do with getting a more settled lifestyle and the lifestyle that we originally planned to come out here for. I didn't leave the company because of the job. I left it for my own sanity, if you like, and because I wanted to better myself by running my own business. (Colby, Male, 50)

Additionally, a greater degree of decision difficulty was often associated with a collective '*decision locus*'; such that the complexity of decision-making increased when a participant's decision impacted on significant others or was one that needed to be taken collectively, rather than individually:

But I felt I had to be prepared when I was leaving my job for her [a life partner], and leaving my home, and my family for her, that I was doing it for reasons of my own as well doing it for her, because otherwise you could really screw your relationship up. It [the decision to leave] was tough because, I really enjoyed the work I did, but she [her partner who worked for the same organisation] really hated it. (Desiree, Female, 28)

Lastly, the analysis revealed '*perceived decision control*' to be a significant factor influencing the degree of decision difficulty experienced. Participants who were already '*discontent with the status quo*' described taking a desirable, deliberate, and mostly avoidable decision to 'leave on their own terms'. In contrast, participants who were content with the

status quo, particularly those who reached a tipping point, said they felt compelled by their circumstances to take a decision to leave. This compulsion related to the need to regain control over their personal situation, despite an obvious preference for staying and their strong attachment to the pre-shock status quo. To this end, several participants described their decision to leave as undesirable, but largely unavoidable. This was manifest in the data as tension between wanting to stay, or in some instances feeling obligated to stay, and simultaneously sensing a need to leave. This was coded as *'experiencing cognitive dissonance'*. For example, Rosemary explained that, while she recognised that leaving presented a potential means for coping with the demands being placed on her by the *'altered social context'*, she did not want to give leaving serious consideration due to a very personal and mental commitment she had previously made to staying. Similarly, Lydia held a preference for staying but felt exogenous pressure to leave:

I had found it quite hard to step up to management and when I eventually did I was determined to stick out for at least three years.... It was having committed to three years in my head, that that's what I was going to do. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

So, even though I didn't want to leave, when June and July came around and I realised, "Oh, I don't wanna leave now," I [pause]... I never really wanted to leave, it's just some of these external forces are saying, "Yep, you've gotta go," and then realising that I had a [long pause]... oh, well May was a big, like I said, a big life changing month. (Lydia, Female, 22)

'Experiencing cognitive dissonance' did not only arise out of a direct, or conscious, tension between staying and leaving cognitions. For example, Aubrey explained that, having been part of an urban search and rescue team (USAR) tasked with recovering survivors and victims of the disaster, he had difficulty re-engaging with his job upon return to work. His intense experience of the earthquake event (high *'perceived shock magnitude'*) was significantly disorienting and impacted on his attempts to re-establish normalcy in his work situation. He explained that while he was physically present at work, mentally he was distant as he felt that he still had unfinished business in the recovery effort:

...the reason we [USAR volunteers] found it difficult to get back to life was the fact that we knew that there was still so much work to do in Christchurch that we needed...[pause] we should be back in town. I knew where I should be, but I also knew that I couldn't be there. You wanted to do your job but for all sorts of reasons it's like... [pause] there's the wall socket and there's the plug, but you can't put the plug in the socket. And so that was like a friction in my mind... [pause] I was still functioning as a normal human being, but in here [points to his head] there was a detachment that I had never experienced before and I could not understand how that happened. (Aubrey, Male, 52)

For some participants 'experiencing cognitive dissonance' was associated with the 'surfacing of latent disquiet' which resulted in feelings of being torn between leaving and a strong attachment to their job or profession, and/or an attachment to place (for example, the City of Christchurch), or attachment to people (for example, a significant relationship or loved one). Irrespective of its source, 'experiencing cognitive dissonance' was unsettling, and often psychologically upsetting for participants, thus contributing to the level of decision strain experienced. Consistent with cognitive dissonance theory (Cooper, 2011; Festinger, 1962; Maertz, Hassan, & Magnusson, 2009), this state of psychological discomfort motivated participants to take action in order reduce or resolve the dissonance. This action did not, however, come in the form of an immediate search for alternative employment, thoughts of quitting, or a decision to leave. Rather, as Aubrey goes on to explain, it triggered the process of 'engaging in critical reflection':

It was a catalyst, a tipping point if you like... So then I started to think about all the other things like you know, understanding where I was in my life or where I thought I was in my life. And then, after a week or two weeks, I started to think to myself, "Well, look if this is going to have marked effect on how I do things with my life, where is my life? Is everything in order?" My marriage is good, click, ticked. Family's fine. Phone, house, got a job. The future, hmmm? I sat down with my wife and she said to me

“Well, to what do you isolate the main problem?” And that’s basically how it [the process of critical reflection] started. (Aubrey, Male, 52)

In summary, several decision characteristics influenced the extent to which participants engaged in critical reflection, these being *‘perceived decision magnitude’*; *‘perceived decision control’* and *‘decision locus’*. These three codes are all properties of the higher-order category *‘decision difficulty’*. Additionally, decision difficulty was increased by the fact that the outcomes of the decision were mostly ambiguous or uncertain. The analysis indicated that higher *‘decision difficulty’*, coupled with a strong attachment to the pre-shock status quo, necessitated a higher level of conscious deliberation beyond mere *‘rational choice between known alternatives’*. Psychological discomfort stemming from uncertainty, the *‘surfacing of latent disquiet’* and *‘experiencing cognitive dissonance’* further motivated participants to engage in a process critical reflection.

The nature of engaging in critical reflection

The initial response of many participants to the shock(s) was an attempt to maintain or restore the pre-shock status quo. However, the direct, and/or cumulative, impacts of the *‘altered social context’* necessitated participants to undertake a *‘reassessment of the status quo’*. It was during this reassessment of the status quo that participants described engaging in a process of conscious deliberation and deep reflection. This was aimed, not at identifying or evaluating alternative employment opportunities, but at interrogating the very assumptions upon which their *‘attachment to status quo’* was based. Initial open coding revealed a variety of approaches used by participants during the process of reflection. These codes included, among others, *‘pausing to think seriously about the future’*; *‘questioning taken for granted assumptions’*; *‘analysing assumptions and presumptions’*; *‘debating and questioning the importance of work or life plans’*; *‘searching for meaning’*; *‘re-imagining the future’*; and *‘reassessing attachment’*. Through the use of constant comparison, these initial open codes were subsumed under the higher order category of *‘engaging in critical reflection’*.

While the code or category label *'engaging in critical reflection'* was arrived at inductively, the term 'critical reflection' is by no means new or unique to the present study. Therefore, and given the importance of this category to the overall analysis, the literature was consulted in order to explore the appropriateness and fit of this category. Definitions of critical reflection invariably refer to the process as involving 'a critical reassessment of values, trajectories, and goals in response to a disorienting dilemma' (Mezirow, 1990); 'challenging personal norms, assumptions and taken-for-granted' (Cope, 2003); 'a deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, and allow for higher-level thinking' (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2005); 'reframing one's interpretation of complex or ambiguous problems' (Hatton & Smith, 1995); 'creating new understandings and way of acting by making conscious the assumptions governing one's actions in a specific context' (Cranton, 1996); and 'the removal of constraining mindsets in order to liberate individual potential' (Rigg & Trehan, 2008). These definitions fit well with the processes described by participants and served to reaffirm the appropriateness of category label, as well as confirm the accuracy of the initial process of open coding.

The findings revealed that *'engaging in critical reflection'*, most commonly, involved participants interrogating one or more of three sources of attachment:

- (1) *'Attachment to people'* – as illustrated in Vincent's comments below, participants reflected on the importance of personal relationships with significant others either impacted by, or impacting on, their decision to leave. In terms of this particular source of attachment, the analysis found that critical reflection centred almost exclusively on extra-organisational relationships (i.e. with family, friends, loved ones), rather than intra-organisational relationships (i.e. with co-workers, supervisors, customers).

So it's a process that the two of us [participant and spouse] went through where our big debate really was, do we stay because the family's in Christchurch or do we think, "Well, we need to do what we need to do for our lives too" because you know, do we drive ourselves crazy with getting so stressed with trying to deal with the situation in Christchurch or do we say, "Right, we need to do what actually we need to do for our

lives.” And as we went through that process the more and more we came to the conclusion that “No, our lives are just as important as everybody else’s and everybody needs to make the decision that’s right for them”. (Vincent, Male, 32)

- (2) *‘Attachment to profession or work’* – this entailed reflecting on attachment to one’s job, career trajectory, or specific organisation. Most often this stemmed from the *‘surfacing of latent disquiet’* and critical reflection centred on questioning the assumptions that participants perceived to be holding them back from pursuing more meaningful pursuits or unanswered callings. This is illustrated in Colby and Harriette’s comments below.

The earthquake made everybody take stock of their lives quite a bit and I sort of took a step back and had a look at where we [participant and spouse] were and what we were doing. And basically we got to a stage where we were looking at our lives. Myself and my wife this is, and I sort of said, “You know, really I didn’t come all the way from New Zealand to work my butt off and be tired all the time”, you know. I said, “Look, no, really we need to just focus on living” as opposed to trying to be super rich or, you know, working ourselves to an early grave. (Colby, Male, 50)

So I had what I wanted [in terms of career] and then, yeah, just change [the earthquakes] came along and, yeah, made me think about my own future in different terms. It caused me to question the things that I had taken for granted. That, you know, your home that you thought you were going to spend the next number of years in is perhaps not as important as you thought it was going to be. Decisions about the future of your city are changed therefore the job that you thought you were always going to have maybe you aren’t always going to have it and maybe you shouldn’t always have it and maybe it’s time to seize a new opportunity and make changes. (Harriette, Female, 54)

- (3) *‘Attachment to place’* – As alluded to earlier, several participants described their decision to leave their organisation as secondary to a more significant decision to leave

the post-crisis situation. As Barry's comments below illustrate, participants reflected critically on their attachment to the city of Christchurch, the Canterbury region, or a particular community to which they belonged.

My partner got an email from a couple of her close family members who said "you just don't have to be there" and it made us realise that perhaps we didn't. That was a big turning point really. I was still trying to get out of it [leaving], and she sort of said, you know, "Why are we here?" (Barry, Male, 35)

'*Engaging in critical reflection*' was often explained as a deliberate attempt to reduce or eliminate stress or strain associated with '*experiencing cognitive dissonance*'. This was particularly evident for participants who had made previous unsuccessful attempts to cope with the demands of the '*altered social context*' and to reduce cognitive dissonance by rationalising their attachment to the status quo. For example, Eleanor (Female, 27) explained that she initially was very satisfied in her job and had no plans for leaving prior to the earthquakes. Following the first major earthquake, she felt unsettled and thought about leaving the region, however her partner sought to reassure her and encouraged her to stay in the region. Despite recognising leaving as a coping mechanism she rationalised her staying in terms of her relationship to her partner, prioritising his preference for staying; as well as her belief that further large earthquakes were unlikely. Eleanor explained that, after each subsequent major earthquake, she went through similar cycles of rationalisation, none of which fully eliminated the cognitive dissonance being experienced. This resulted in escalating stress and strain, which ultimately led to Eleanor to reach a tipping point where she felt she could no longer cope with the stress she was experiencing. With the intervention of close family members she was able to engage in a process of critical reflection, which centred on the importance of her relationship with her partner and her attachment to the City of Christchurch. '*Engaging in critical reflection*' resulted in Eleanor coming to the realisation that her own personal wellbeing was more important than her '*attachment to people*' and '*attachment to place*'. Consequentially she took the decision to leave her partner and the region in order to regain control in her life. In the end leaving her job was merely part of a greater decision to leave the region.

Having discussed the factors the necessitate engaging in critical reflection, as well as the nature of the process, attention is now directed at understanding the consequences of both engaging in critical reflection and failure to do so.

The outcomes of engaging critical reflection

Eleanor's story illustrates how '*engaging in critical reflection*' resulted in her '*coming to a realisation*' that regaining a sense of control and stability required letting go of certain sources of attachment. This was coded as '*detaching from the status quo*' and was revealed by the analysis to be the main outcome of '*engaging in critical reflection*'.

'*Coming to a realisation*' that the assumptions underpinning their attachment to the pre-shock status quo no longer held true in the post-shock context was a theme commonly expressed by participants who reported '*engaging in critical reflection*'. Some participants, such as Colby, likened '*coming to a realisation*' to an epiphany; a serendipitous moment of clarity that enabled them to transition from a staying mindset to one of leaving.

And it was quite euphoric at the time because it made, you know, it was almost like having an epiphany if you like, you know, "Oh, no, hang on, we can actually do this [leave to start his own business]. It was like I got a "eureka" moment, a sort of feeling that we could really do it, you know. It was liberating." (Colby, Male, 50)

For other participants, such as Robby, '*engaging in critical reflection*' involved a more protracted period of reflection and gradually '*coming to a realisation*'.

And over time it became very clear to us that we were just trying to make it work for the sake of it and trying to hold onto something [envisaged life plans and lifestyle in Christchurch] that had actually left. And something that had kind of bugged off over the horizon for us. So over time, once we came to realise that the Christchurch we were trying to hold onto and the lifestyle we were trying to hold onto was no longer there it wasn't a hard or painful a decision to make... And I distinctly remember us looking at

each other going, what, is this really an option? Will we do this? And it was just one of those moments where we both kind of like, yeah I think we could. I think we should.
(Robby, Male, 35)

The analysis further revealed that *'coming to a realisation'* took one of two forms, both of which facilitated *'detaching from the status quo'*. First, some participants described *'coming to a realisation'* that leaving represented a positive opportunity to address the disquiet that had previously lay dormant or latent prior to the shock. This was most commonly the case with participants whose pre-shock motivational state was one of *'disquiet with the status quo'*. These participants explained that *'engaging in critical reflection'* led them to realise the importance of pursuing more a meaningful career or employment; a previously unanswered calling, or in some cases a meaningful interpersonal relationship; and that doing so required *'detaching from the status quo'*. Consequentially participants transitioned from a pre-shock preference for staying to one where leaving was viewed as a positive and desirable outcome, enabling them to make a new beginning.

For a second group of participants, *'engaging in critical reflection'* led to the realisation that, while not desirable, leaving represented the most appropriate response for coping with the circumstances brought to bear by the *'altered social context'*. This was most commonly the case for participants whose pre-shock motivational state was one of being *'content with the status quo'*. These participants also described transitioning from a strong pre-shock preference for staying to, ultimately, one of leaving. However, unlike the group of participants described above, leaving was not viewed as a desirable or positive outcome, rather it presented a tolerable outcome; an acceptable means for coping with the situation and regaining a sense of control and stability. These participants commonly expressed a degree of reluctance in making the final decision to leave, hence the term reluctant departure. However, many of the same participants described feeling a great sense of relief that followed the crystallisation of their decision to leave:

Yeah, it was – all – you know all those clichés about a weight lifted off your shoulders, it was all of that, because we finally could see a light at the end of the tunnel. So yeah

once we'd made [but not yet executed] that decision it was absolute relief and we felt like we could get moving again on getting our lives started, and get cracking, you know. Yeah, we literally were going to get cracking with our plans. (Robby, Male, 35)

Once I'd made it [the decision to leave] I just felt relief that, you know, I didn't feel that pressure on me to have to put that distance between me and the kids. (Monique, Female, 42)

A real relief because you suddenly realise that you've done it [made the decision to leave] and you're free of that burden that was there. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

For both groups of participants, 'coming to a realisation' and 'detaching from the status quo' was followed shortly by the crystallisation of a decision to leave. For almost all participants discussed here, the decision to leave crystallised in the absence of any formal job search behaviour, and was not contingent on securing alternative employment. Most of these participants left without having secured alternative employment. The few participants who did engage in job search behaviour explained doing so only after making a conscious, and in their mind often irrevocable, decision to leave. This is evidenced in the comments below and is contrary to the conceptual ordering in traditional models of turnover decision making in which job search behaviour precedes, and therefore informs, the decision to leave.

And we didn't put any effort into looking for other jobs until the decision [to leave] was made. Yeah so it wasn't until we'd tendered our resignations that we kind of put into action what was next really. What the hell are we going to do? (Robby, Male, 35)

I wouldn't have applied for the job if I hadn't already made my mind up to leave. (Barry, Male, 35)

At that point we had pretty much made up our minds that the right thing for us to do was to leave, and I don't think there's a lot that the organisation could have offered

me to actually change that. I mean even if they'd said "oh, we'll double your salary" or whatever, I don't think it would have made any difference. (Vincent, Male, 32)

This finding reaffirms the earlier inference that turnover decision making involves separate phases of detachment and effectuation. This has important implications in terms of understanding decision speed and opportunities for mitigating employee turnover. The findings suggested that for many participants reaching a point where reflection was required took some time. Additional time was required to engage in critical reflection and to come to a realisation that leaving was an option worth considering. However, once participants successfully '*detached from the status quo*', the data suggests that leaving mindsets crystallised rapidly. Once crystallised there was little scope for organisational mitigation of turnover. Participants also noted that, while '*detaching from the status quo*' was associated with considerable decision strain and emotion, this reduced substantially following the crystallisation of a decision to leave; thereby making way for a more rational, and less emotive, effectuation of the decision. This is evidenced in the comments below:

It was a highly emotional decision to start with, that changed into a very practical decision at the end of it. (Colby, Male, 50)

So that was the moment I guess [coming to a realisation], that the decision was – okay, I'm going start job hunting. Yeah, and then it was almost too easy. I started job hunting and I got a job within a few weeks. (Rosemary, Female, 56)

Certainly in the decisions that we made non-work life was the greater dilemma I guess, yeah. Certainly work was a consideration, I did not completely disregarded work all together, but I took the position that, you know, non-work life was the greater concern. And I do have to say that the work decision [decision to quit job] was a much quicker and easier decision than the family and friends decisions. (Vincent, Male, 32)

The importance of '*engaging in critical reflection*'; '*coming to a realisation*'; and '*detaching from the status quo*' in the turnover decision-making process cannot be

overstated. Through engaging in this process, participants were able to successfully transition from an initial preference for staying to one where leaving was desirable, and if not so, then at least acceptable. In so doing, participants reduced the affective component of their decision. This paved the way for a more rational consideration of alternatives and planned execution of the decision to leave. Participants contended that this gave them a degree of control over their decision; that, in the end, it was still ‘their’ decision to leave.

The consequences of not engaging in critical reflection

As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, a small group of participants (n = 6) failed to recognise that they had ‘reached a tipping point’ and were unsuccessful in initiating a meaningful ‘reassessment of the status quo’. For these participants, the analysis found little to no evidence of ‘engaging in critical reflection’ or ‘coming to a realisation’ that leaving represented a desirable or acceptable outcome. As a consequence, the participants had difficulty ‘detaching from the status quo’, and instead made repeated unsuccessful attempts to restore or maintain the pre-shock status quo. A final shock was seen as the last straw that pushed them beyond the tipping point. It resulted in the execution of a rapid, ill-considered, and often emotionally charged decision to quit. The data suggests that for these participants the crystallisation of their decision to leave and the enactment of that decision took place within a short space of time. Sometimes it occurred concurrently, with minimal conscious deliberation or rational consideration of alternatives. Only one of the six participants engaged in any form of job search prior to leaving; and five of the six left without having looked for, or secured, alternative employment.

I just went “boom”, that was it. Made the decision – done, dusted, I’m out of here.
(Estelle, Female, 57)

All six participants in this group described their decision to leave as emotionally taxing. They recalled it being associated with a high degree of psychological strain emanating from the cumulative impact of stressors in the altered social context, in combination with acute stress brought to bear by a last straw shock. The decision to leave was most often described

as an impulsive and ill-considered reaction to an acute stressor, made in the context of chronic stress and depleted psychological and physiological resources. The data suggests that the combination of chronic stress and resource depletion impaired the ability of participants to engage in critical reflection or a rational consideration of alternatives. Participants viewed their leaving as a negative outcome, and associated the decision with negative feelings such as regret, anger, loss, grief and despair; hence the use of the phrase ‘*tragic endings*’ to characterise this group of participants. Participants who expressed regret did not regret the decision to leave *per se*, but rather the manner in which the decision was enacted.

When I made that decision, apart from feeling, you know, a huge, I don't know, turmoil about doing that. I'd had a lot of grief all that time since, you know, the whole time it was grief for me. I've had grief around losing my team leader, my coordinator, my team, my job at [the organisation]. I still feel sad at times, I really miss what I did. I feel bad about the fact that I left the way I did [resigning on the spot, in the heat of the moment]. I didn't want to leave in that way, but I just didn't really feel like I had options. I didn't feel like I could go and talk to anybody. (Brenda, Female, 48)

I was very sad because I was leaving someone that I had worked with... that we had a great relationship, we worked extremely well together. It was sad because I really enjoyed what I was doing and who I was working most closely with. It was very sad and you know, I had [long pause] it was very emotional, very emotional, sad, because you get close to these people. (Annie, Female, 46)

And I don't want to get all angry just talking to you now, because I was quite angry when I left, but that was the main reason that I left, because he just oh [pause, visibly upset] I just – I sort of get angry when I think about him [new manager post-earthquake], and I'd just think, well, it's not good, it's not good. (Trevor, Male, 55)

While most participants in this group associated their decision with negative feelings, several participants also described feeling a great sense of relief or freedom following the decision. The findings showed that this sense of relief was similar to that experienced by

participants who were successful in '*detaching from the status quo*', as discussed earlier. The difference being, however, that for these participants the sense of relief was experienced only after the actual enactment of the decision to leave. Additionally, the analysis found that, having left their jobs, five of the six participants experienced a period of hiatus, most often self-imposed, during which they were able to recuperate and thereafter engage in a process of critical reflection and conscious deliberation about their future.

So I did hand in my resignation. I took a couple of weeks off with sick leave, because I had so much sick leave owing and I was just so stressed out. And then I was like "oh my God what do I do now". Yeah, up until then it was just reactionary. It was when I left that all of a sudden I could sit back and have time to reflect on what I was good at and what I really wanted to do with my life. And that's when I started my own baking business. Low and behold that's actually going like the clappers and I love it. (Raquel, Female, 48)

It was just all just go, go, go and I made my decision then. There was just no quiet time until I made that decision. So I did that [engage in critical reflection] after I left. (Annie, Female, 46)

It was just like somebody took a brick off my shoulders, it really was. It felt like I'd been carrying round this huge weight and suddenly it wasn't there anymore. Yes, it's just the total mental relaxation that I've had since then. (Estelle, Female, 57)

The finding that this group of participants still saw it necessary, and in many instances, were able to engage post-hoc critical reflection warrants further discussion. For these participants the tension between staying and leaving was still largely present even after the enactment of their decision to leave. For these participants, at least in the short term, leaving appeared to enhance rather than reduce strain. This was manifest in the expressed post-decision regret and grief. The data appears to suggest that physically detaching from the organisation, or the broader post-crisis situation (i.e. leaving), does not automatically result in psychological '*detaching from the status quo*'. Detaching from the pre-shock status quo still

required *'engaging in critical reflection'* in order to come to terms with the decision and enable the individual to engage in a more rational decision process.

Leaving the organisation and imposing a period of hiatus appeared to enable this post-hoc critical reflection process in two ways. First, it removed the participant from the situation allowing them to focus cognitive resources, not on responding to or coping with immediate and acute stressors, but on consideration for their longer term future. Second, it enabled the participants to recuperate and rebuild both their physical and cognitive resources, as evidenced by several participants taking a deliberate holiday or self-imposed hiatus from employment following their decision. It was during this post-decision hiatus that several participants described engaging in a process critical reflection. For four of the six participants, this resulted in quite dramatic career or job shifts, or leaving work altogether. For example one participant went from working in special needs education to working in a garden centre; while another went from a very senior public service role to selling baked goods at a local farmers market.

Not all participants in this group reported engaging post-hoc critical reflection. Negative case analysis revealed one participant, Doris (Female, 52), who at the time of the interview, explained that she had still not had the opportunity to fully recuperate and take a step back from her situation in order to reflect and engage in conscious deliberation about the future. This was largely attributed to an inadequacy of physical, psychological and time resources for doing so, as well as a lack of social support. As a single parent, whose main priority following the disaster was the wellbeing of her teenage son, she remained in 'response mode'. Her account, below, suggests that she was successful in 'escaping' her immediate physical situation. However, she was unsuccessful in detaching from the pre-shock status quo, which in turn inhibited her ability to transition to a new life:

Absolutely not. No, there's never been relief. You know, every time I drive the road from Christchurch to [new home in the North Island] it's like that first time, it's just so raw. I'm driving along a road that's just taking me to this godforsaken place. It's like I'm just driving further and further and further away from everything that I've known,

you know, because I was born and bred in Christchurch and I'm 52, so I've spent, you know, 50 years in one place. Anytime anybody even mentioned the word Christchurch I just started crying and I couldn't stop. I couldn't talk about it. I was getting chronic stomach pains, I was bloating, I suffered migraine headaches, so that was something new from the earthquake. Never had them before, but migraines that would like knock me out for three days and I was lying around with a cold wet flannel on my head. I would say that my emotion around that is still extremely raw. An example, I was at a health seminar not so long ago and everybody there was from [new town], and the presented started with this kind of blanket statement, "oh, you're all from [new town]", all of a sudden I just had this massive rush right through my whole body, this heat rush, and it was just like I saw red, and I just blurted out "actually I'm not from [new town], I'm from Christchurch, I'm currently living in [new town]". So there's obviously something, you know, very, very deep seated in there that - yeah...[long pause] you know.... [pause] I would say I don't actually feel as though I have a home.

(Doris, Female, 52)

Doris' account, as well as those of the other five participants in this group, highlight once again the important role of '*engaging in critical reflection*' and '*detaching from the status quo*' in turnover decision making. The analysis showed that failure to engage in critical reflection and detach from the status quo hindered the ability to undertake a more rational consideration of alternatives, which in turn resulted in detrimental consequences for participants. Of the six participants in this group, one made a lateral career move, two exited the employment market altogether, and three ended up in roles which they considered to be of reduced importance and financial worth. From a career or employment perspective all of these participants viewed the outcome of their decision to leave negatively. Furthermore, failure to detach from the pre-shock status quo meant that participants had difficulty letting go of their old situation. This impeded the ability to come to terms with the decision to leave which, in Doris' case, further hampered efforts to adjust to her new situation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter sought to explicate the core decision-making processes engaged in by participants, differentiating between two core processes of rational choice and critical reflection. Engaging in critical reflection was a pervasive theme in the decision-making process for a large proportion of study's participants. However, the extent to which participants undertook, the timing of, and also the necessity for engaging in critical reflection varied considerably. The findings presented in this chapter lead to the conclusion that turnover decision making by no means homogenous, showing instead considerable variation in terms of the cognitive steps, and level of reasoning, involved. Much of this variation can be accounted for by contextual factors.

Chapter 7, which follows, discusses the moderating effects of these contextual factors on the decision-making processes of participants, and in doing so presents a substantive theory of employee turnover decision making that is grounded in a post-crisis context.

CHAPTER 7:

A GROUNDED THEORY OF EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

INTRODUCTION

This thesis set out to develop a grounded theory of employee turnover decision making. In doing so, it makes two significant contributions to the literature on voluntary turnover. First, it proposes a typology which describes four distinct patterns of leaving that follow a significant extra-organisational shock. This typology not only addresses the heterogeneous and complex nature of turnover decision making, but also provides a more nuanced explanation of the turnover process than that offered by traditional attitudinal models. Second, the study specifies the contextual factors which shape turnover decision making in a post-disaster context. This chapter is presented in three parts commencing with a discussion of the typology of leaving and an explication of the unique decision paths followed by each type of leaver. Following this, the four contextual influences shaping turnover decision making are discussed in relation to existing research and the contribution they make to the voluntary turnover literature. Together, the typology and the contextual factors, represent the grounded theory contribution of this thesis. The chapter concludes by discussing the research and practical implications of the study, as well as its limitations.

A TYPOLOGY OF LEAVING: *Eventually everyone leaves, but all leaving is not the same.*

The previous chapter concluded with the observation that participants' decision making was by no means homogenous, revealing instead considerable variation in terms of the cognitive steps involved and the extent of conscious deliberation afforded to the decision. The most salient of these differences related to whether or not participants engaged in a process of critical reflection. Consequently '*engaging in critical reflection*' was elevated to the level of core category and located centrally within the analysis. The final stage of analysis and theory building involved systematically integrating the most important constructs and contextual conditions around the core category of '*engaging in critical reflection*' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). Doing so led to the emergence of four distinct patterns of leaving which are labelled: (1) Deliberate departers; (2) New beginnings; (3) Reluctant departers; (4) Tragic endings. In the section that follows each type of leaving is discussed in detail.

Deliberate departers (n = 8)

Salient contextual features:

Discontent with the pre-shock status quo; low decision difficulty; low experienced shock magnitude; high availability of resources.

Salient decision features:

Active job search behaviour; rational evaluation of alternatives; job offer in hand upon leaving; minimal decision strain.

Brief description:

Deliberate departers hold a strong pre-shock preference for leaving which is manifest in thoughts of quitting, strong intentions to leave, active job search behaviour and previous attempts at securing alternative employment. Leaving is viewed as a means to address job dissatisfaction or enact pre-existing plans for leaving. As such deliberate departers display high psychological readiness to leave. However, their ability to enact this preference for leaving may be constrained by exogenous circumstances, most commonly a lack of suitable alternative employment opportunities. These individuals are likely to perceive low volitional control over the ability to leave and thus experience frustration at not being able to do so (Allen, Peltokorpi, & Rubenstein, 2016).

The role of shocks:

Shocks have little direct impact in terms of triggers turnover decision making for deliberate departers, and are seldom attributed as the primary reason for their leaving. Rather, shocks act as an effectuation mechanism by removing barriers to, or enhancing opportunities for, leaving; in effect increasing volitional control over the existing preference to leave. Shocks may also play a secondary role in eroding community embeddedness and/or attachment to place, which in turn expedites the enactment of pre-existing plans for leaving or reduces the decision strain associated with accepting unsolicited job offers.

Decision making process:

Deliberate departers have weak, if any, attachment to the pre-shock status quo. Consequently, the decision to leave does not require transitioning motivational state or detaching from the status quo. There is therefore little, if any, need to engage in critical reflection. Decision making centres on leaving one organisation for another, with utility maximisation being the key consideration. Active job search behaviour and a rational evaluation of known alternatives play a central role in the decision process. Securing suitable alternative employment is deemed a prerequisite for leaving and the employee is unlikely to leave without a job offer in hand. Once barriers to leaving are removed and a job offer is secured, enacting the decision to leave is rapid and takes place with little decision or emotional strain. This process is depicted in Figure 7.1.

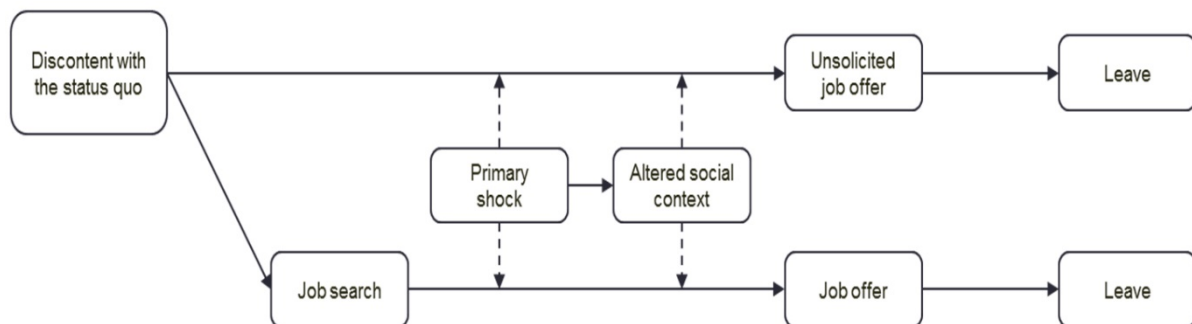


Figure 7.1. Decision making process for Deliberate Departers

Decision outcomes:

Deliberate departers view leaving as a positive outcome and a means to advance their career or pursue more meaningful vocational interests. Leaving typically results in an upward, or at least lateral, career move. These leavers are typically quite happy to part ways with the organisation. Given that their primary reasons for leaving stem from dissatisfaction with the status quo, and in particular dissatisfaction with the job or organisation, mitigation of turnover through organisational intervention may be possible.

New beginnings (n = 9)

Salient contextual features:

Disquiet with the status quo; moderate-high decision difficulty; moderate experienced shock magnitude (high initial shock impact, low event continuity); high availability of resources.

Salient decision features:

Surfacing latent disquiet; cognitive dissonance (tension between attachment to status quo and pull forces for leaving); engaging in critical reflection; coming to a realisation; detaching from the status quo, crystallisation of decision to leave.

Brief description:

Although generally satisfied with, and committed to, their job and organisation, new beginnings have an underlying sense that they will not stay with the organisation forever. They are unclear, however, as to exactly when or how they might leave. Future plans for leaving, if they exist, are vague or indeterminate as little conscious deliberation is afforded to latent disquiet and intermittent thoughts of leaving (e.g. one day pursuing an unanswered vocational calling). Unlike deliberate departers, any pre-shock preference for leaving is weak (or dormant) and yet to manifest in definitive turnover intentions or active job search behaviour. While new beginnings are likely to perceive relatively high volitional control over staying or leaving, they have yet to develop a clear preference for leaving. This increases decision difficulty as the decision requires detaching from the status quo and transitioning from a preference for staying to one of leaving.

The role of shocks:

Shocks have a direct triggering impact on the decision to leave and serve to initiate the decision making process by disrupting the status quo and surfacing latent disquiet; which unsettles the individual. Shocks may also play a secondary and more indirect role in the decision process by introducing a period of hiatus, during which disquiet is surfaced and critical reflection can take place. Turnover deliberations are generally triggered by the initial

jarring impact of the shock, while the sustained and cumulative impact of subsequent shocks play a less significant role.

Decision making process:

New beginnings exhibit low pre-shock psychological readiness to leave and are partially content with, and attached to, the status quo (albeit with some underlying reservation or unease). This state of partial contentment is brought into question when latent disquiet is surfaced in response to the jarring impact of a shock. Surfacing latent disquiet generates cognitive dissonance which the individual attends to by engaging in critical reflection. Critical reflection centres on conflicting preferences for staying and strengthening pull forces for leaving, and concludes with the individual coming to a realisation that leaving represents a desirable outcome. Detaching from the status quo enables the individual to transition from a staying to leaving preference, and is followed shortly by the crystallisation of a decision to leave. As the decision to leave centres on the pursuit of more meaningful opportunities (often unrelated to the current role or career), securing alternative employment is not a prerequisite for decision enactment. Any job search activity or rational weighing of alternatives is likely to occur only after the decision to leave has crystallised. This decision process is depicted in Figure 7.2.

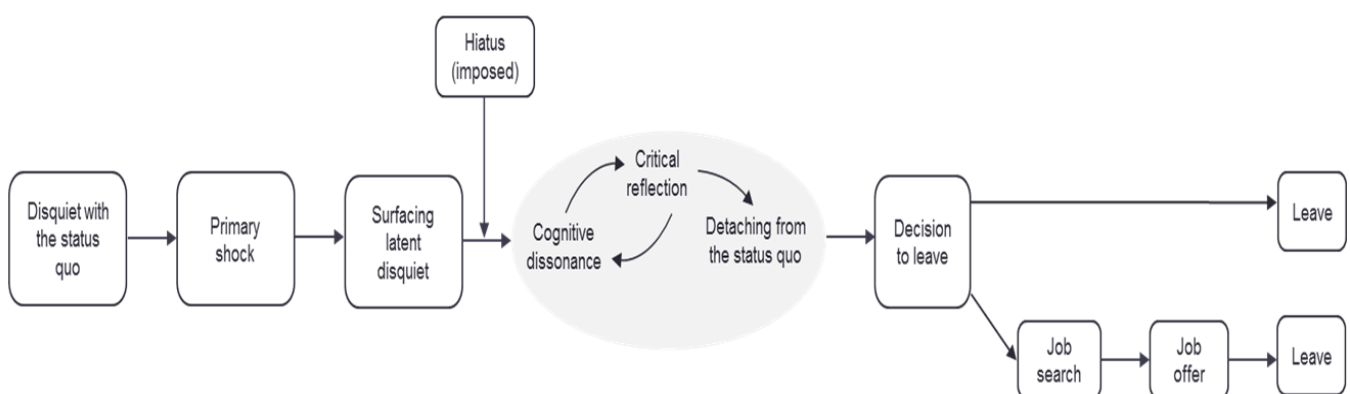


Figure 7.2. Decision-making process for New Beginnings

Decision outcomes:

New beginnings come to view leaving as a desirable outcome and an opportunity to pursue more meaningful work or relationships that they otherwise may have been reluctant

to pursue prior to the shock. Leaving commonly entails more than just moving from one organisation to another for a similar position, and may involve occupational change, a move into self-employment, or even exiting the labour market to focus on important personal relationships. New beginnings may be sad to leave the organisation, but at the same time are positive about the future. As such, once the decision to leave has crystallised there is little scope for organisational mitigation of their leaving.

Reluctant departers (n = 8)

Salient contextual features:

Content with the status quo; high decision difficulty; high experienced shock magnitude (moderate shock impact, high event continuity); deterioration of general resource availability.

Salient decision features:

Reaching a tipping point (which is recognised); cognitive dissonance; engaging in critical reflection; coming to a realisation; detaching from the status quo; crystallisation of decision to leave.

Brief description:

Reluctant departers have a pre-shock preference for staying and strong attachment to the status quo. They exhibit a high level of job satisfaction, affective commitment, job and/or community embeddedness and have clear plans to stay with the organisation in the medium to long-term. Reluctant departers plan to stay with the organisation because they want to (strong preference for staying) and because they can (high perceived volitional control over this staying preference). The cumulative impacts of multiple shocks diminish the individual's perceived control over their preference to stay, to a point where they feel compulsion to leave despite very much still wanting to stay. Reluctant departers come to accept that, although not desirable, leaving represents the most appropriate outcome given the significant disruption to the pre-shock status quo. The decision to leave centres less on organisational attachment and more on coping with the impacts of the shock and regaining a

sense of control over life plans. Leaving often involves exiting the broader post-shock situation, and the decision to leave the organisation may be just one part of a much larger and more complex decision.

The role of shocks:

The jarring impact of the initial shock is buffered by the individual's pre-shock motivational state. Experienced shock magnitude is high due to sustained exposure to stressors arising from the altered social context. A tipping point is reached and the individual recognises the need to reassess their attachment to the status quo in order to cope with escalating demands and deteriorating resources.

Decision making process:

Reluctant departers exhibit low pre-shock psychological readiness to leave due to their contentment with, and strong attachment to, the status quo. This state of contentment is ultimately brought into question when the individual reaches a tipping point and is forced to reconsider their attachment to the status quo. In recognising a tipping point has been reached the individual engages in critical reflection, often during a period of self-imposed hiatus and with the support of significant others. Critical reflection centres on resolving cognitive dissonance brought about by the tension between a strong preference to stay and strengthening push forces for leaving. Critical reflection concludes with the individual coming to a realisation and acceptance that leaving represents the most appropriate outcome for dealing with the situation. This acceptance enables the individual to detach from the status quo, and is followed shortly by the crystallisation of a decision to leave. Securing alternative or better employment is not the primary driver of the decision to leave and is thus not a prerequisite for decision enactment. Any job search activity or rational weighing of alternative opportunities is likely to occur only after the decision to leave has crystallised. This decision process is depicted in Figure 7.3.

Decision outcomes:

Reluctant departers recognise that leaving is in their best interest, however, they do not want to leave and thus do so reluctantly. As a result of having to detach from the status

quo the decision process is cognitively and emotionally straining. Despite this, decision outcomes are generally positive and most reluctant departers go on to gainful employment in similar positions or industries with the aim of keeping pre-shock career or life plans on track.

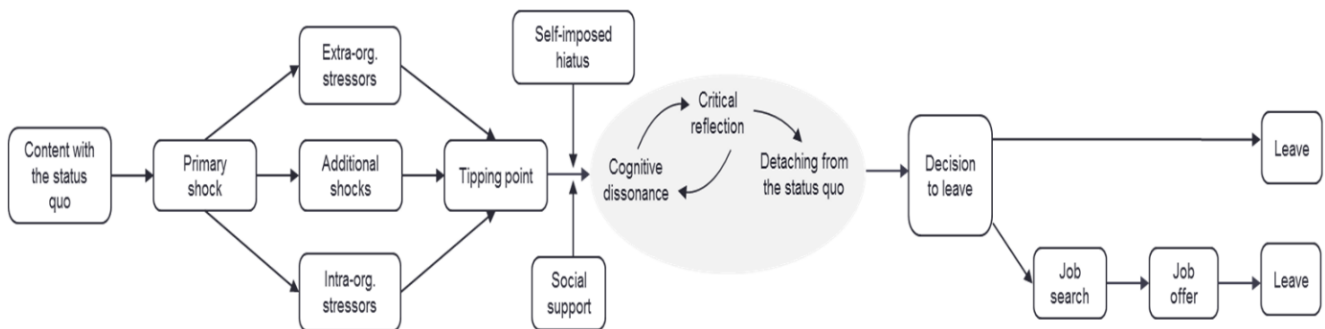


Figure 7.3. Decision-making process for Reluctant Departers

Tragic endings (n = 6)

Salient contextual features:

Content with the status quo; high decision difficulty; very high experienced shock magnitude (high shock impact, high event continuity); severe deterioration of resource availability.

Salient decision features:

Reaching a tipping point (which is unrecognised); cognitive dissonance; last straw shock; post-hoc engaging in critical reflection.

Brief description:

Similar to reluctant departers, tragic endings have a strong pre-shock preference for staying and perceive high volitional control over this preference. They display high levels of job satisfaction, job and/or community embeddedness and affective commitment towards the organisation. They anticipate staying with the organisation for the long term and have not entertained thoughts of quitting. As with reluctant departers, the cumulative impacts of multiple shocks diminish the individual's perceived control over their preference for staying to a point where they feel compelled to leave. Several key features distinguish tragic endings from reluctant departers, which include a failure to recognise the reaching of a tipping point;

greater severity of resource deterioration; the presence of a last straw shock; and the absence of hiatus and critical reflection. Resoluteness to maintain or restore the pre-shock status quo results in tragic endings affording little conscious deliberation to leaving. Faced with significantly depleted resources and ongoing demands, the decision to leave is not the outcome of a process of reasoned decision making but more commonly an impulsive response to an acute stressor.

The role of shocks:

Shocks play multiple roles in the decision making of tragic endings. The initial jarring impact of the shock is buffered by pre-shock motivational state, however, experienced shock magnitude is very high due to the sustained exposure to stressors arising from the altered social context. The reaching of a tipping point goes unrecognised leading to further resource depletion. A last straw shock pushes the individual beyond the tipping point.

Decision making process:

Tragic endings exhibit low pre- and post-shock psychological readiness to leave due to their contentment with, and very strong attachment to, the pre-shock status quo. This state of contentment is challenged by cumulative stressors arising from the altered social context. Repeated unsuccessful attempts are made at maintaining or restoring the pre-shock status quo. Stress and strain (resulting from escalating demands and significantly diminished resources) impair the ability of the individual to recognise the reaching of a tipping point. The individual becomes overwhelmed by the demands placed on them by the altered social context and, in response to a last straw shock, makes an impulsive decision to quit. The decision to quit and its enactment occur within a short space of time of one another, possibly even simultaneously. Job search behaviour and a rational choice between alternatives do not feature as part of the decision process, and securing alternative employment is not a prerequisite for leaving. This process is depicted in Figure 7.4.

Decision outcomes:

Tragic endings do not want to leave the organisation. They would prefer to stay with the organisation and 'go back to things the way they were prior to the shock'. Failure to engage in critical reflection and detach from the status quo results in a high degree of cognitive and emotional strain, which impacts the ability of the individual to successfully transition into a new role. Tragic endings are unlikely to leave with a job offer in hand. Post-decision critical reflection is common as tragic endings attempt to make sense of, and come to terms with, their decision to leave. Failure to engage in post-decision critical reflection may impair the individual's ability to secure meaningful employment in the short-term.

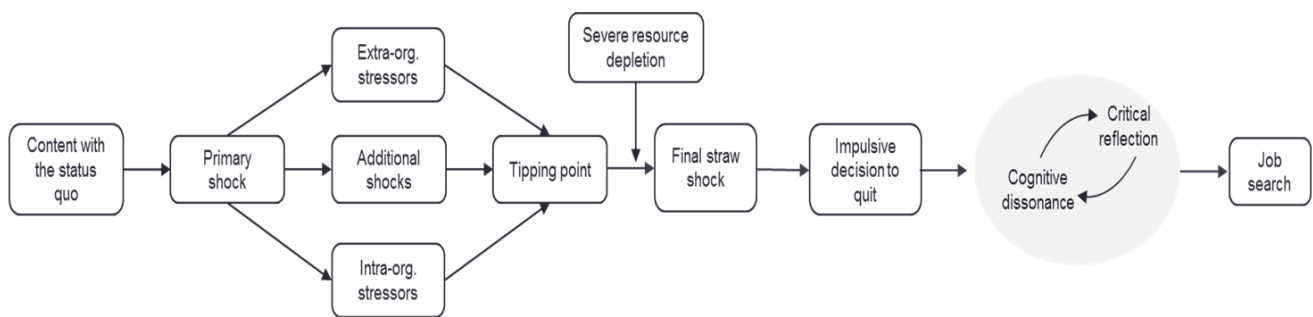


Figure 7.4. Decision-making process for Tragic Endings

DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The typology of leaving highlights the heterogeneous nature of turnover decision making and reveals the process to be significantly more complex than that suggested by traditional attitudinal models of voluntary turnover. The four paths to leaving vary considerably in terms of the nature and intensity of conscious deliberation afforded to the decision to leave. For *tragic endings* the final decision to quit is impulsive and involves little in the way of conscious deliberation or rational decision making. *Deliberate departers*, for whom a relatively straight forward and rational choice between known alternatives suffices as the core decision process, exhibit a more moderate level of conscious deliberation but do not engage in a process of critical reflection. The decision paths followed by *new beginnings* and *reluctant departures* involve extensive deliberation, coming in the form of the complex, and often emotionally-laden, process of engaging in critical reflection. A robust grounded

theory should be able to account for such variation through the specification of the conditions that exert influence on the basic social process under investigation. The distinctive contribution of this thesis therefore lies in not only presenting a typology of leaving, but also in specifying how four contextual factors shape turnover decision making. These factors, (1) pre-shock motivational state; (2) decision complexity; (3) experienced shock magnitude; and (4) the availability of resources, are discussed in detail below in terms of the unique contribution they make to extant turnover theory and their relationship to previous research.

Pre-shock motivational state

'Pre-shock motivational state' captures the broad staying or leaving mindset embodied by an individual prior to experiencing a shock. By conceptualising three distinct pre-shock motivational states this thesis is able to explain instances of turnover that are not derived from job dissatisfaction or strong intentions to quit, thereby addressing a significant gap in the literature on voluntary turnover. The findings demonstrate that pre-shock motivational state plays a significant role in shaping the turnover decision-making process, such that employees who are already 'discontent with the status quo' are less likely to engage in critical reflection than those who experience 'disquiet with the status quo' or are 'content with the status quo'. This finding lends support to the arguments proffered by Maertz and Campion (2004), and more recently Hom et al. (2012), that different pre-departure states are likely to result in alternative forms of decision framing and sequencing.

Being content with the status quo corresponds closely with Hom et al.'s (2012) 'enthusiastic stayer' mindset, which is characterised by a high degree of affective commitment and person-job fit. Hom et al. (2012) posit that employees with this mindset are generally loyal and engaged and thus have a low likelihood of leaving. This they attribute to a strong desire to stay and a high degree of perceived control over this preference. Hom et al. (2012, p. 840) go on, however, to speculate that enthusiastic stayers are likely to "*stay with an organisation until they retire, become disabled, die or spontaneously receive better job offers*". The findings of the present study do not support this assertion, demonstrating instead that the shocks have the potential to result in an individual making a transition from a very

strong staying mindset to one of leaving. While such transitioning of motivational state is alluded in the literature, the process by which this might occur has yet to be articulated by researchers (Bergman et al., 2012). The findings of the present study address this gap directly by highlighting the complex interplay between shocks and pre-shock motivational state, and explicating how engaging in a process of critical reflection facilitates the transitioning of motivational state. These findings merit further discussion.

Hom et al.'s (2012) dimensions of turnover desirability (preference to either stay or leave) and perceived decision control are useful for understanding how shocks bring about state transitions. Arguably, transitioning from one motivational state to another would entail change to either one or both of these dimensions. In cases where an individual is highly '*content with the status quo*', the findings of this thesis strongly suggest that the shocks do not immediately or directly alter their preference for staying. As discussed in earlier chapters, participants who were content with the pre-shock status quo were still highly satisfied and had strong affective commitment towards their organisation at the time of their leaving. They would ultimately have preferred not to have left their jobs or the region, as evidenced in repeated attempts to restore or maintain the pre-shock status quo. This finding is consistent with organisational commitment theory which argues that employees with high levels of affective commitment are likely to resist countervailing forces that have potential to disrupt continued employment (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). The findings indicate that, while continued exposure to shocks may attenuate a strong preference for staying, it is unlikely to alter this preference directly or immediately. Rather, the greater impact of shocks comes from diminishing the perceived control an individual has over exercising their preference for staying.

The findings demonstrate that disruption to the status quo introduces uncertainty, disrupts life plans, and leaves the individual with a diminished sense of personal control. Sustained and cumulative exposure to these and other stressors culminate in psychophysiological strain and depleted personal resources for coping with the demands imposed by the altered social context. This in turn results in an individual feeling compulsion to make a decision in order to regain control over personal circumstances or life plans. While

leaving is recognised as a possible means for coping with the demands of the situation, it conflicts with a strong preference for staying. Cognitive dissonance results from holding a strong preference for staying in the face of diminishing control over this preference. Resolving cognitive dissonance necessitates engaging in a process critical reflection in order to detach from the status quo. This enables the individual to transition from a pre-shock preference for staying to one where leaving is deemed tolerable, albeit not necessarily desirable.

It is important to comment on the use of the term 'perceived' decision control. None of the participants in the study were coerced by their employers into leaving their jobs, none were made redundant, and there were no legal impediments to their continued employment with their organisations. All left of their own volition, yet many contended that they felt compelled by their circumstances to make a decision. One possible explanation for these expressed feelings of compulsion can be found in the job demands-resources literature, in particular the demand-control model (Karasek, 1998). The central premise of this model is that a combination of high job demands and low job control or decision latitude is likely to result in psychological strain. Conversely high control may ameliorate strain by enhancing one's ability to cope with stressors. Further explanation for this finding can possibly be found in the coping literature, and specifically the distinction between engagement (or control) and disengagement (or escape-avoidance) coping strategies (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Engagement coping strategies attempt to manage or control stressors, whereas disengagement approaches are aimed at avoiding or escaping stressors (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Hirschman & Exit, 1970; Ito & Brotheridge, 2003). Most participants who were content with the status quo responded positively to the initial shock. They demonstrated strong loyalty to their organisations and to the pre-shock status quo, and exerted significant resources attempting to maintain or reinstate the status quo; indicating perhaps an initial engagement or control approach to coping. However, the findings suggest that continued exposure to shock-induced stressors resulted in a depletion of personal resources which led to perceptions of diminished control. It is likely that the sustained depletion of resources contributed, at least in part, to participants changing their approach to coping from one of control to one of escape-avoidance. The role of resources is discussed separately and in more detail in later sections.

Shocks appear to have a more direct impact on the desirability of leaving when there is pre-existing disquiet with the status quo. Participants whose pre-shock motivational state was characterised as '*disquiet with the status quo*' held a weak preference for leaving, underpinned by latent disquiet. The findings suggest that the initial jarring impact of a shock results in latent disquiet being surfaced and becoming more salient. The surfacing of latent disquiet heightens the desirability of leaving and has the potential to generate cognitive dissonance. As above, this necessitates a reassessment of the status quo and engaging in a process of critical reflection. Critical reflection strengthens the desire to pursue alternative (perceived as more meaningful) careers or relationships. The realisation that barriers to exit are not insurmountable results in a shift from a weak or underlying preference for leaving to one where leaving is deemed to be a desirable outcome. The findings suggest that for these participants shocks did not alter perceived decision control significantly. Most argued that they could have left prior to the shocks, however, the desire to do so was not strong and had not prompted them to take action. It is argued that by not being actively dissatisfied the individual will feel little compulsion to act on the underlying disquiet. This argument fits with Hom et al.'s (2012, p. 851) assertion that "*when affect is relatively neutral and one has control over the decision to stay or leave, the status quo wins – it is easier to stay than leave*". Importantly, however, the findings reveal that shocks directly impact this suggested state of 'neutral affect' by surfacing latent disquiet which in turn initiates turnover deliberations. These findings are consistent with the traditional conception of shocks as jarring events that directly initiate the psychological processes associated with leaving (Holtom et al., 2005). This thesis extends, however, the current understanding of how shocks trigger turnover deliberations by elucidating the new construct of latent disquiet and explicating the role of shocks in surfacing disquiet and strengthening dormant preferences for leaving.

Finally, the findings suggest that when an individual is already discontent with the status quo, shocks are less likely to result in a transitioning of motivational state. That is, no evidence was found to suggest that experiencing a shock results in an individual transitioning from being discontent with the status quo to being content with the status quo. While this may well be a consequence of only studying leavers, and therefore a limitation of the present

study, it does suggest that once a strong preference for leaving has crystallised, mitigating actual leaving will be difficult. The findings further suggest that shocks may enhance decision control by reducing exit barriers or enhancing opportunities for leaving. Shocks can therefore expedite leaving through their direct impact on an individual's ability to action their leaving preference. This conceptualisation of shocks as an effectuation mechanism extends the current understanding of shocks beyond that of discrete events which trigger turnover deliberations.

In summary, the findings suggests that the decision to leave one's job often requires a transitioning of motivational state, and that such transitions can occur through changes to both desirability of leaving and/or perceived volitional control over leaving. The findings demonstrate that shocks play an important role in this process. The process of transitioning from one motivational state to another involves detaching from the status quo which necessitates engaging in critical reflection. This thesis argues that the need for engaging in critical reflection is greatest when there is a strong attachment to the status quo, and maintaining this attachment is in conflict with demands imposed on the individual by the altered social context. It is further argued that engaging in critical reflection is not necessitated where pre-existing attachment to the status quo is weak, or where one has a high degree of volitional control over staying or leaving.

The buffering effects of pre-shock motivational state

This thesis also adds to our understanding of how pre-shock motivational state might buffer the impact of shocks. The findings indicate that an individual's response to a significant extra-organisational shock will be moderated by pre-shock motivational state, such that employees who are highly content with the status quo are less likely to be dislodged by the initial jarring impact of a shock, but are more likely to succumb to the cumulative and sustained impacts of ongoing shocks. This argument is evidenced in the findings pertaining to decision speed; defined as the total time from the initial shock to final exit. The analysis revealed that participants who were content with the status quo displayed a longer total turnover time than others; averaging 14 months from the time of the initial shock to the time

of exit, compared with an average of 10 months for the remainder of the participants. It is argued that strong attachment to the status quo and a desire to stay buffers the initial impact of shocks. This finding has partly been explained above in relation to participants' attempts at countervailing the disruptive impacts of the altered social context and the role of latent disquiet, but can be further explained by drawing on job embeddedness theory (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, et al., 2001).

While job embeddedness was not coded for specifically due to the emergent nature of the analysis, the findings suggest that participants who were content with the status quo displayed high levels of organisational and community embeddedness. Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell, and Lee (2010) note that embedded employees are generally highly involved in their organisations and have high expectations for future involvement with the organisation. They contend that this high level of involvement, or embeddedness, results in individuals being more resilient to disruptive forces and less likely to react to stimuli that are inconsistent with pre-existing mindsets. Recent studies offer empirical support to the argument that job embeddedness buffers the impact of shocks on employee turnover (Burton et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2014). This understanding helps explain the longer decision time displayed by participants who were content with the status quo, both in terms of their initial attempts to resist or control disruptive forces, and the difficulty they experienced in detaching from the status quo. It also helps explain the converse, that participants who are discontent with the status quo or experience disquiet with the status quo are more susceptible to the direct impact of shocks on their decision making.

Previous studies have, however, failed to consider that there may be a limit to this buffering effect. For example Burton et al.'s (2010) study only considers the impact of negative on-the-job shocks. They fail to account for the exact nature of the shock, how negative it was, and most importantly, whether the shock occurred more than once, thus ignoring the potential impact of multiple shocks or cumulative shock impacts. This is not uncommon in studies incorporating shocks. The findings of this thesis suggest that there are limitations to the arguments offered by Burton et al. (2010). Drawing on escalation of commitment theory (Staw, 1981), Burton et al. argue that in the pursuit of pre-determined

goals, highly embedded individuals will continue to exert, or even escalate, effort in order to protect their relationship with the organisation despite the impact of shocks. They further argue that exposure to a shock builds a form of 'resilience'. That is, having withstood the force of one shock, an even stronger shock is required to dislodge an employee or initiate turnover deliberations. The findings offer some support to the first argument proffered by Burton et al. (2010). Indeed, participants who were highly content with the status quo initially displayed a high level of stoicism when faced with the initial shock impacts and sought to maintain the status quo. The findings demonstrate, however, that this initial buffering effect is not always sustainable in the context of multiple shocks and sustained disruption to the status quo. Furthermore, the findings run counter to Burton et al.'s (2010) argument that exposure to shocks builds resilience and results in a greater ability to deal with subsequent, and even more significant, shocks. In many instances, the last straw shocks that led participants to quit impulsively were often benign and less significant in terms of impact than the initial shock. These findings provide a more nuanced perspective on Burton et al.'s (2010) assertion that embedded, or highly involved, employees are better able to resist shocks and extend this work by suggesting that the availability of resources imposes a limit on this buffering effect.

Decision difficulty

Most studies examining turnover decision making construe the decision to leave as an individual decision that is limited to a narrowly defined organisational context. The fact that turnover decisions might vary in terms of complexity and decision difficulty, and that such variations could have a bearing on subsequent decision-making processes, has largely been overlooked by turnover scholars (Morrell & Arnold, 2007). This gap is addressed directly by the current thesis through the identification of '*decision difficulty*' as a key factor influencing the turnover decision-making process.

'*Decision difficulty*' captures the magnitude and complexity of the decision to leave, and was conceptualised by integrating the three categories of '*decision locus*'; '*decision control*'; and '*decision magnitude*'. (The properties of '*decision difficulty*' are not discussed in detail here as these have been discussed in the previous chapter). Decision difficulty can range

from a relatively easy and straight-forward choice between known alternatives to more complex decisions involving unknown alternatives and a considerable degree of uncertainty. The findings indicate that decision difficulty is highest when there is a collective decision locus, when decision magnitude is high, and when the individual perceives low volitional control over their decision.

This thesis argues that decision difficulty directly influences the extent of conscious deliberation afforded to the decision, such that the need to engage in critical reflection increases in accordance with increasing decision difficulty. This argument is consistent with research in the field of judgement and decision making, which suggests that complex and multidimensional decisions involving high levels of uncertainty, and the substantial investment of resources, necessitate subjecting the decision to significant levels of conscious deliberation (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014; Calvillo & Penaloza, 2009; Chatterjee & Heath, 1996; Dijksterhuis, Bos, Nordgren, & Van Baaren, 2006). While the argument that decision difficulty influences subsequent decision making is intuitively appealing, it warrants further discussion and elaboration in terms of the specific properties of decision difficulty and the manner in which they influence the decision making process.

With respect to '*decision locus*', it is argued that a collective decision locus renders the decision to leave more multidimensional, thus increasing the information load and complexity of the decision. Attending to this complexity and increased information load necessitates a greater degree of conscious deliberation and collective decision making. Trade-off difficulty (the inherent conflict and emotional difficulty that arises from sacrificing one goal or outcome for another) and preference uncertainty (the extent to which alternatives are ill-defined or unstable) are also likely to be magnified with a more collective decision locus (Broniarczyk & Griffin, 2014); particularly in situations where normative pressures to stay are in conflict with an individual's preference to leave, or vice versa (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004).

'*Decision magnitude*' refers to the overall importance attached to the decision to leave and varies according to the foci of the decision, the importance the individual places on their role in the organisation, and also role tenure. With respect to '*decision foci*' the findings

indicate that decisions to leave the broader earthquake situation, and by implication the Canterbury region, were more difficult to make than simple organisational transitions. There are several explanations for this. First, leaving the situation increases decision complexity and the number of alternatives that need to be considered, thus increasing the information load of the decision. The findings also suggest that the specific post-disaster context served to further magnify decision complexity due to the ongoing nature of the aftershock sequence and the uncertainty that this introduced. Second, the findings indicate that leaving the situation increases trade-off difficulty as one is required to consider multiple trade-offs and sources of attachment. In this respect the individual needs to consider not only organisational attachment, but also attachment to place and people. Third, leaving the situation entails greater personal sacrifice than merely moving from one organisation to another in the same city. Broniarczyk and Griffin (2014) note that generating and evaluating such a multiplicity of options is cognitively taxing and emotionally demanding, and has the potential to generate cognitive dissonance and deplete decision making resources.

'Perceived role importance' and *'role tenure'* influenced *'decision difficulty'* primarily through trade-off conflict. Participants who believed their role was of significant importance to their organisation, or who had been with the organisation for a substantial amount of time, expressed that leaving came with a greater degree of sacrifice than those participants who were in entry level positions or who had not been with the organisation for much time. They viewed their decision as very important and thus afforded considerable deliberation to it. This is consistent with arguments that decisions which are important to the decision maker are more likely to be experienced as stressful or difficult to make (Rettinger & Hastie, 2001; Tang, Shepherd, & Kay, 2014), and empirical evidence showing that when the threshold for quitting is low, employees are able to more easily detach from the status quo (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008). These findings are also consistent with job-embeddedness theory, particularly in relation to the embeddedness dimensions of 'links' and 'sacrifice' (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, et al., 2001). In terms of links, longer role tenure is likely to result in a network of interpersonal relationships with co-workers and other constituents that embed the individual in the organisation, making leaving more difficult. With respect to sacrifice, high perceived role importance is likely to be associated with significant sacrifice. Job

embeddedness theory argues that significant sacrifice reduces the desirability of movement as the higher 'costs' associated with leaving deter individuals from vacating their roles. Moreover, taking '*decision foci*' into consideration, decisions to relocate out of the region are likely to necessitate sacrificing not only on-the-job embeddedness, but also community embeddedness. Leaving the region is further likely to involve the severing of important social or familial ties, which Feldman, Ng, and Vogel (2012) recently conceptualised as family embeddedness within the community. The analysis suggests that all of the above factors heighten decision difficulty by increasing the trade-off conflict between staying and leaving.

Decision difficulty is also influenced by '*perceived decision control*'. The findings indicate that deliberate or intentional decisions to leave the organisation are generally associated with lower levels of decision difficulty. In contrast, perceived compulsion to make a decision increases decision difficulty. While volitional control has been discussed in some detail in the previous section, certain aspects warrant further discussion here. There are several possible explanations for the finding that perceived decision control influences decision difficulty. First, individuals who described feeling compelled by their circumstances to make a decision had not previously entertained thoughts of quitting and as such they held no pre-existing plans or alternatives for leaving. Broniarczyk and Griffin (2014) argue that such a lack of pre-existing preferences prior to commencing decision making increases preference uncertainty. Their research indicates that constructing preferences while in the midst of identifying and evaluating alternatives adds significantly to decision difficulty. On the other hand, individuals who clearly identify a desirable outcome or ideal future state experience less decision difficulty. These arguments help explain the difficulty many participants had in trying to resolve the conflict between a strong preference to stay and feeling compulsion to leave. They also help explain why, when preference certainty is high (as in the case of participants who described their decision as 'really easy', 'straight forward', and 'a no brainer'), there is little need for extensive conscious deliberation. For these participants, the outcome of their decision was largely known and desirable, as such the actual decision involved little in the way of generating alternatives and resolving trade-off conflict. Within the decision making literature it is generally accepted that decisions involving less conflict are more easily resolved (Chatterjee & Heath, 1996).

Second, cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962) is helpful in understanding the relationship between '*perceived decision control*' and '*decision difficulty*'. As discussed in earlier sections, conflict between a preference for staying and feeling compulsion to leave has the potential to generate cognitive dissonance. In relation to decision control, recent research suggests that cognitive dissonance is amplified when decision making autonomy is reduced (Hinojosa, Gardner, Walker, Coglisier, & Gullifor, 2016; Takeuchi, Shay, & Jiatao, 2008). Furthermore, the forced compliance model of cognitive dissonance suggests that dissonance is greatest when an individual feels pressure to choose between imperfect alternatives. This was certainly the case for many of the study's participants who were faced with a scenario where the status quo was becoming untenable, yet the alternative (leaving) was deemed to be neither attractive nor desirable. This thesis argues that the resulting state of discomfort motivates participants to engage in a process of critical reflection. In summary, the above discussion provides strong support for Morrell and Arnold's (2007) argument that turnover decisions vary in degree of difficulty and complexity, and that such variations influence the nature of the decision-making processes.

Experienced shock magnitude

A third factor shown to influence the nature of turnover decision making is the degree to which a shock disrupts the pre-shock status quo and destabilises the individual. This disruptive impact is conceptualised as '*experienced shock magnitude*'. It is derived from two categories: '*perceived shock impact*' and '*perceived event continuity*', which are depicted in Figure 7.5 along with their associated sub-categories. '*Perceived shock impact*' captures the direct consequences of the shock(s) and the disruptive impacts of the '*altered the social context*' as subjectively experienced by participants. '*Perceived event continuity*' refers to the duration of '*perceived shock impact*'; more specifically, whether participants were affected by the initial jarring impact of the primary shock or the more cumulative and sustained impact of multiple shocks and stressors in the altered social context.

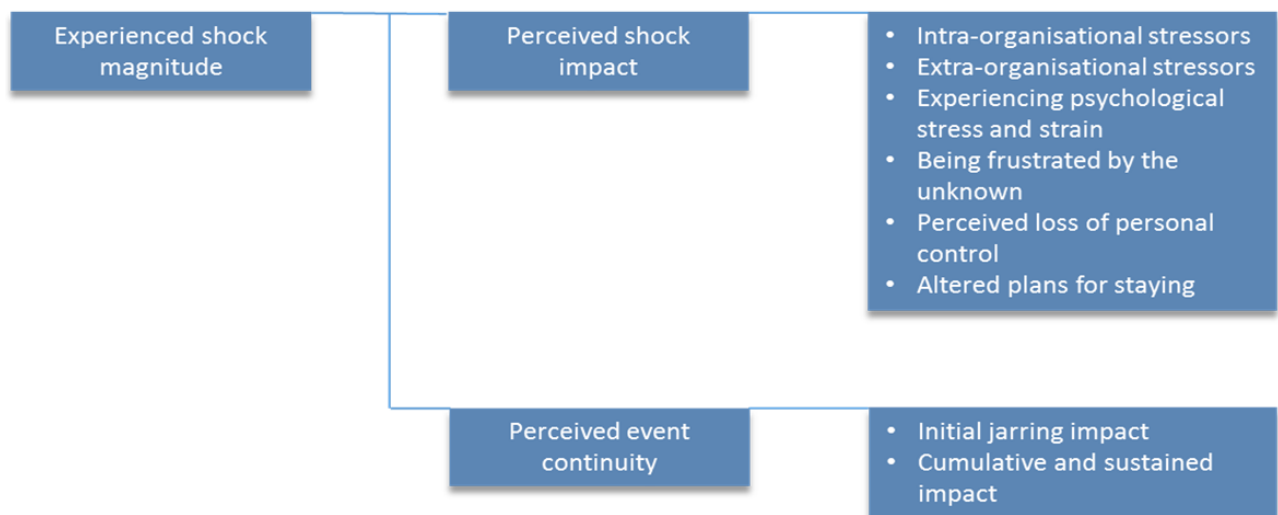


Figure 7.5. Experienced shock magnitude

'Experienced shock magnitude' is low when the shock represents a discrete event (i.e. low *'event continuity'*) and has little to no disruptive impact on the individual, either at work or outside of the organisational context (i.e. low *'shock impact'*). *'Experienced shock magnitude'* is moderate when shock impact is high but very short in duration (i.e. low *'event continuity'*). Distinction is made in terms of high *'experienced shock magnitude'* in an attempt to capture the fact that moderate to low shock impacts can lead to a tipping point being reached if these impacts are sustained over a prolonged period of time (Hobfoll, 2011; Michailidis & Banks, 2016). To this end, *'experienced shock magnitude'* is deemed to be high when the impacts of the shock are moderate to low (i.e. low *'shock impact'*) but these impacts are sustained over a prolonged period (i.e. high *'event continuity'*). Finally, *'experienced shock magnitude'* is very high when stressors in the *'altered social context'* result in significant disruption to the status quo (i.e. high *'shock impact'*); and this disruption to the status quo is sustained over a prolonged period of time (i.e. high *'event continuity'*). These four degrees of *'experienced shock magnitude'* are depicted in Figure 7.6 below.

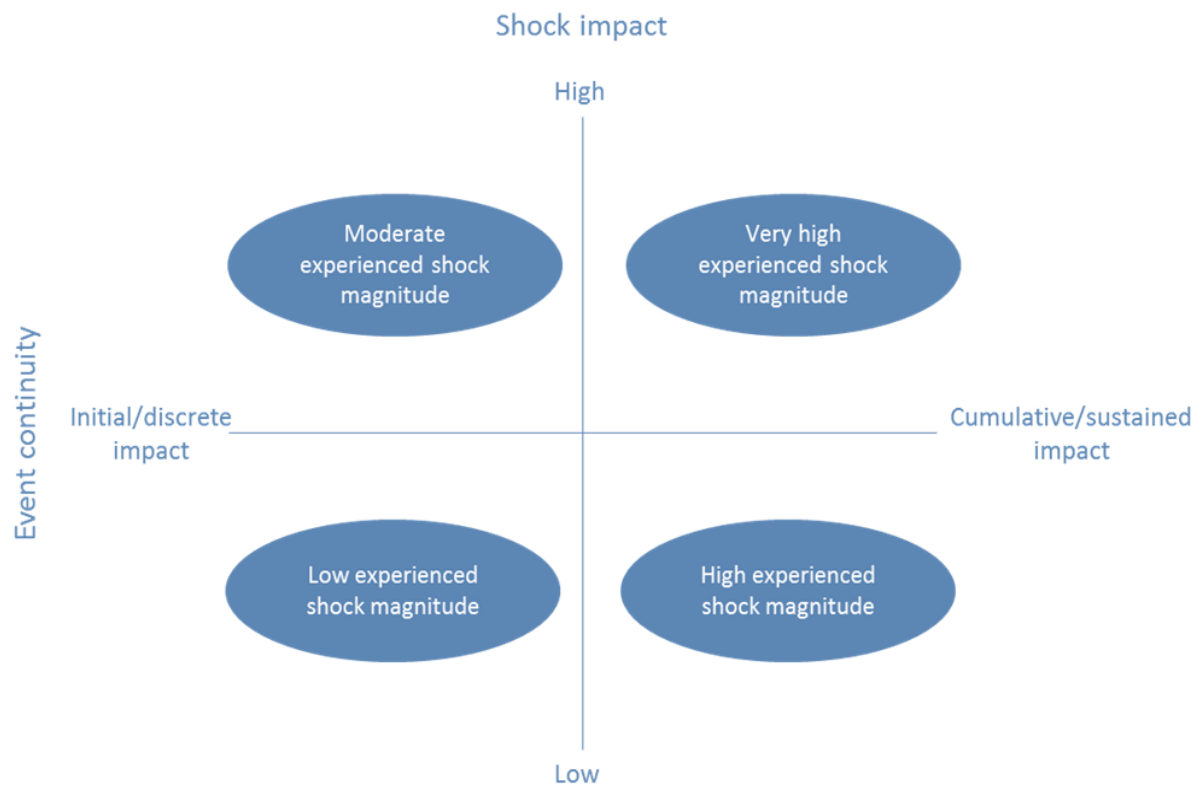


Figure 7.6. Varying degrees of experienced shock magnitude

The findings indicate that when shock impact is low a single shock is unlikely to trigger turnover deliberations. This is consistent with Lee and Mitchell's (1994) argument that shocks need to be sufficiently jarring in order to shake an individual from his or her inertial state. Also consistent with Lee and Mitchell's view on shocks, the findings demonstrate that when shock impact is high discrete events can lead directly to turnover deliberations. However, the findings of the present study suggest that that this occurs most often in the presence of latent disquiet or when positive affect is low. The findings further indicate that when positive affect is high and attachment to the pre-shock status quo strong, discrete shocks are much less likely to directly prompt turnover deliberations; even when shock impact is high. It argued therefore that participants demonstrated varying levels of 'resilience', or conversely, vulnerability to shocks. Earlier sections attributed this resilience in part to the buffering effect of pre-shock motivational state. It was further noted that this buffering effect has its limits and that, over time, continued exposure to stressors erodes the ability of an individual to withstand subsequent shocks. These limits were evidenced in cases where participants, who had long withstood the impact of the initial shock, ultimately reached a '*tipping point*' where

they felt compulsion to reassess their attachment to the status quo; or worse made an impulsive decision to leave in response to a '*last straw shock*'. This suggests that in order to destabilise an individual who is highly content with the status quo, '*experienced shock magnitude*' must be high; that is both shock impact and event continuity need to be high.

The above argument is consistent with conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). COR theory is premised on the principle that resource loss is more salient than resource gain, and that the sustained loss of resources is likely to result in stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, depression, and physiological strain (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). Hobfoll (2011) notes that individuals can become trapped in resource loss spirals, particularly following significantly traumatic or stressful events, and that sustained cycles of resource loss have the potential to erode personal resilience. Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, and Pfefferbaum (2008) argue that COR theory is a particularly apt lens through which to understand resource loss in a post-disaster context, given the fact that natural disasters threaten a host of object (housing); personal (optimism, safety); social (kinship and friendship ties); and energy (time, money) resources.

Norris et al.'s (2008) arguments support the findings of the present study. Participants who were highly content with the status quo held a strong attachment to this pre-shock motivational state. When the shock(s) threatened this attachment, participants invested significant personal resources into attempts to maintain or restore the pre-shock status quo. Such resources were initially in abundance and came in the form of strong social bonds within the organisation and personal resources such as energy, optimism about the future, job security and a sense of personal control; as well as 'object' resources such as a family home and stable income. Over time, the cumulative impacts of the altered social context had a direct influence on the availability of these resources, as participants made repeated unsuccessful attempts at maintaining the pre-shock status quo. The sustained nature of the aftershock sequence meant that participants had little opportunity to replenish resources in the face of escalating demands. The findings suggest that several participants entered a spiral of resource loss, which resulted in significant stress and strain and diminished resilience to

withstand subsequent shocks. This led one group of participants to recognise that they had reached a tipping point and that action needed to be taken in order to regain control over their circumstances and prevent further resource loss. Doing so required a reassessment of their attachment to the status quo which necessitated engaging in a process of critical reflection.

The literature on burnout offers an additional explanation as to why some participants reached a tipping point, but failed to engage in critical reflection or subsequent rational decision making (Demerouti et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In integrating theories of burnout with COR theory, Hobfoll (2011) notes that burnout is a likely outcome when there is a lack of resource gain or replenishment in the face of chronic resource loss, which appeared to have occurred for this particular group of participants who failed to realise that a tipping point had been reached. The findings of the present study are consistent with recent research examining the relationship between burnout and decision making style. Notably, Michailidis and Banks (2016) found individuals who experience high levels of burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion, are more likely to engage in spontaneous, irrational and risky decision making. These authors also contend that the chronic stress associated with burnout impairs cognitive performance and limits one's ability to undertake a logical evaluation of alternatives. This helps explain why participants who were pushed beyond a tipping point failed to engage in critical reflection.

In summary, within the turnover literature shocks have typically been defined as discrete events that lead directly to turnover deliberations (Holtom et al., 2012; Holtom et al., 2005). Studies incorporating shocks have also tended to focus quite narrowly on shocks as negative workplace events, although some studies have attempted to distinguish between shocks that are expected versus unexpected; positive versus negative; or organisational versus personal (Holtom, Goldberg, Allen, & Clark, 2016; Holtom et al., 2005; Morrell, Loan-Clarke, & Wilkinson, 2004b; Purl, Hall, & Griffeth, 2016). As a result of the narrow definition of shocks as discrete or distinguishable events, Purl et al. (2016) note that researchers most often focus on 'the shock' and not the actual disruptive impacts of the shock or the cumulative effect of multiple shocks, despite acknowledgment in the literature that "more shocks is

worse” (Purl et al., 2016, p. 224). Existing research also does not explain why a specific shock may lead one employee to directly consider leaving but have very little impact on another. The present study makes a significant contribution in addressing this gap by conceptualising the new construct of ‘*experienced shock magnitude*’. Considering both the actual impacts of a shock and the duration of these impacts expands on the traditional view of shocks as discrete events which directly trigger turnover deliberations.

More importantly, by examining the interplay between experienced shock magnitude and pre-shock motivational state, this thesis offers an explanation as to why not all shocks result in leaving; and, significantly, how the cumulative exposure to multiple shocks erodes resilience and renders the individual more vulnerable to subsequent shocks. This thesis also argues that the shock magnitude required to destabilise an individual and prompt a reassessment of the status quo varies according to pre-shock motivational state, such that: (1) low experienced shock magnitude is unlikely to prompt a reassessment of the status quo; (2) moderate experienced shock magnitude is likely to prompt a reassessment of the status quo in individuals where there is pre-existing disquiet with the status quo, but unlikely to do so when an individual is content with the status quo; (3) high to very high experienced shock magnitude is required to destabilise individuals who are highly content with, and hold strong attachment to, the pre-shock status quo.

In summary, arguments are made for expanding the traditional definition of shocks beyond their initial and direct impact on turnover deliberations. Evidence is provided to suggest that construing shocks as a single distinguishable event that jars an employee toward deliberate judgments about his/her job is overly simplistic (Holtom et al., 2005), and that in fact a complex relationship exists between initial, subsequent, and final-straw shocks. Thus, a final contribution of this thesis to the literature dealing with shocks lies in describing three distinct roles that shocks can play in the turnover decision making process in terms of: (1) triggering mechanisms; (2) effectuation mechanism; and (3) last straws. These have been discussed at length in a previous chapter and are thus not revisited here.

Resources: the importance of hiatus and social support

The preceding sections highlight the influence of *pre-shock motivational state*, *decision difficulty* and *experienced shock magnitude* in shaping the decision making of participants; more specifically whether or not engaging in critical reflection formed part of the decision making process. It is argued that engaging in critical reflection is necessitated when an individual is (1) content with the status quo, (2) faces with a complex and difficult decision, and (3) experiences moderate to very high shock magnitude. In grounded theory terms these three factors represent ‘causal conditions’ as they lead the occurrence of the core category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Kelle, 2007). However, by themselves, they do not fully explain the presence or absence of the core category of engaging in critical reflection. The analysis revealed that the ability to successfully engage in critical reflection was further influenced by two enabling or ‘intervening conditions’, namely: (1) hiatus and (2) social support. These two factors are discussed together under the heading of ‘resources’ as both represent important resources that enhance, or inhibit, the process of engaging in critical reflection.

Hiatus, refers to a period of downtime during which an individual is removed from the immediate demands imposed on them by the post-shock context. As noted in a previous chapter, hiatus can take one of two forms. Either it is imposed through organisational disruption and downtime, or self-imposed by individual in a deliberate attempt to create the mental space necessary to engage in deep and purposeful premise reflection. The findings clearly indicate that hiatus facilitates engaging in critical reflection by providing the time, respite, physical and mental space necessary to engage in the process. On the other hand, the absence of hiatus, or respite from day-to-day demands, inhibited the ability to successfully engage in critical reflection. This finding is consistent with Mezirow’s (1990) assertion that premise reflection cannot be part of the immediate action process but requires hiatus from activity in which to critically assess and transform one’s assumptions.

Social support, as it is conceptualised in the present study, refers to the presence of significant others who offered assistance, could be confided in, and whose opinions were

deemed important to participants. As the findings in the previous chapter demonstrated, social support most often came from close family members or friends, but also included instances of support from co-workers or other third parties such as professional coaches or counsellors. The findings suggest that social support influences the process of engaging in critical reflection in two main ways. First, a spouse or significant other can initiate the process of reflection by helping an individual recognise that a tipping point has been reached, and encouraging them to 'take a step back' from the situation. Second, social support appears to play an important role in facilitating the actual process of reflection, particularly when decision locus is collective rather than individual. This was evidenced in the data when participants recalled debating with significant others the assumptions, presuppositions, and beliefs that underpinned their attachment to people, place or profession. The literature confirms that such forms of debate or rational discourse are a common feature of critical reflection and transformational learning (Delahaye, 2015). More specifically, within the disaster management literature, social support has been linked to collaborative problem solving, learning and proactive response to future threats (Walsh, 2007).

In contrast, participants who experienced a significant deterioration, or a lack of social support were seemingly unable to recognise the reaching of tipping point and failed to engage in critical reflection. They subsequently struggled to detach from the pre-shock status quo. The findings further suggest that deterioration of social support contributed to diminished personal resilience and rendered participants more susceptible to final-straw shocks. Ultimately it was these participants who experienced the most deleterious outcomes of their decision to quit. Within the disaster management literature, the importance of social support as a vital resource for coping in the aftermath of a crisis is well established (Aldrich, 2012; Kaniasty, 2012; Norris et al., 2002). Social support has also been shown to be a key determinant of psychological resilience and one's ability to 'bend, but not break' following a significant event or traumatic disturbance (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007; Sippel, Pietrzak, Charney, Mayes, & Southwick, 2015). However, the role of social support has received far less attention from turnover researchers.

In addition to the specific resources of hiatus and social support, it is important to reemphasise the broader role played by resources more generally in shaping participants' decision making. The literature suggests that decision making, in particular the process of critical reflection, can of itself be cognitively and emotionally demanding (Rigg & Trehan, 2008). As Mezirow (1990) notes, critical reflection has the potential to arouse additional cognitive dissonance and feelings of discomfort as an individual grapples with deep-seated assumptions and beliefs. Explicitly challenging one's attachment to, and subsequently detaching from, the status quo is therefore likely to be unsettling; both psychologically and emotionally (Burris et al., 2008; Reynolds, 1998). Engaging in critical reflection would therefore require an individual to draw on valuable psychological resources and energy. van Woerkom, Bakker, and Nishii (2016) make the point that coping with a particular stressor(s) produces fatigue and depletes resources to deal effectively with additional sources of stress. This thesis argues therefore that sustained depletion of resources, and the cumulative stress stemming from such depletion, is likely to impair the ability of an individual to engage in a process of critical reflection or reasoned decision making.

This argument is well-evidenced in the data presented in the previous chapter, however, further theoretical justification for this argument can also be found in the literature on burnout. For example, Michailidis and Banks (2016) demonstrate that emotional exhaustion impairs cognitive ability, as well as the ability to fully comprehend or care about a decision and its consequences. Moreover, their particular study found that individuals suffering from chronic stress tended to avoid decision making due to its potential to amplify existing stress levels. The findings of the present study suggest, however, that such avoidant behaviour in the face of prolonged disruption and exposure to stressors serves only to exacerbate resource loss leading, ultimately, to a tipping point being surpassed. Unfortunately, as the accounts in the previous chapter suggest, this most commonly results in deleterious and regretful decision outcomes. These findings are also supported by research in the broader stress literature which argues that concurrent accumulation of demands in the face of finite or depleted resources increases the risk that an acute stressor (in the present study this took the form of a last straw shock) will lead to negative outcomes (van Woerkom et al., 2016).

In summary, the importance of resources has been a pervasive theme throughout this chapter, and indeed in the accounts of participants presented in the two previous chapters. The findings indicate that resources influence turnover decision making in two ways. First, a lack of resources may act as a causal mechanism triggering turnover deliberations when sustained resource depletion results in a tipping point being reached. The role of resource depletion as a distal antecedent to turnover was alluded to in the literature review and is quite well-established in the turnover literature. Therefore, this finding is not overly surprising and is consistent with research linking job demands-resources and burnout to turnover (Campbell et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2009).

The more novel finding of this thesis pertains to the second role played by resources in shaping actual decision making processes, as this has received much less attention in the literature. The findings indicate that resource availability serves as a facilitating condition for reasoned decision making, and more specifically for engaging in critical reflection. To summarise, this thesis argues that the availability of resources moderates the extent to which critical reflection forms part of turnover decision making, such that: (1) both the presence and efficacy of engaging in critical reflection will be greater when an individual experiences hiatus and social support; (2) individuals who experience sustained resource depletion will be less likely to engage in reasoned decision making and more likely to make a spontaneous decision to leave.

Having discussed the main theoretical contributions made by this thesis, the remainder of the chapter is dedicated to discussing the managerial implications of the research findings, directions for future research and the limitations of this study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERIAL PRACTICE

The findings of this thesis have important implications for the management of employee turnover following a significant extra-organisational shock. First, the findings indicate that organisational mitigation of turnover is possible in some instances, but not all. Thus post-crisis recovery plans need to prepare for ‘unavoidable’ employee turnover, while

seeking to mitigate 'avoidable' turnover, where possible. Additionally, managers need to be aware that employee turnover is possible throughout the post-crisis life cycle, and not only in the period immediately following a significant shock. In this respect, the findings identify several stages in the decision-making process during which managers may be able to mitigate employee turnover, namely (a) when latent disquiet is first surfaced, (b) when a tipping point is reached, (c) when an employee is actively engaged in the process of critical reflection. However, the findings strongly suggest that once a decision to quit has crystallised, organisational mitigation of turnover is highly unlikely. Related to this is the finding that job search and the evaluation of alternatives played a very limited part in many of the participant's decision making, and securing alternative employment was not always a prerequisite for leaving for many a participant. Monitoring of job search behaviour is thus unlikely to be of much benefit to managers seeking to mitigate turnover of such individuals. Similarly, monitoring commonly accepted attitudinal predictors of turnover such as job dissatisfaction or intention to quit may be of less utility in the context of a significant extra-organisational shock, given the finding that many employees who left were highly satisfied with their jobs.

Managers would be better advised to monitor employee stress levels following a significant shock. This could be done at an organisational level through the systematic collection of data using survey measures of job strain or burnout, and at an individual level during constructive conversations between line managers and individual employees. Doing so would also provide managers with an opportunity to establish whether latent disquiet has been surfaced as a consequence of the shock experience. Where disquiet has been surfaced, engaging with the employee in empathetic and constructive conversation will assist with the process of sensemaking (Rothausen, Henderson, Arnold, & Malshe, 2015), which in turn could lead to the employee forming the view that the disquiet is resolvable within the organisation. In such instances, job or leisure crafting strategies may be effective in addressing disquiet and mitigating turnover (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010).

The findings also clearly indicate that construing shocks as a single distinguishable event that jars an employee toward deliberate judgments about his/her job is overly simplistic

(Holtom et al., 2005), and that in fact a complex relationship exists between initial, subsequent, and last straw shocks. Careful consideration should therefore be given to the timing and nature of organisational support offered to employees, as well as their significant others. Organisations most often concentrate their efforts to support employees in the period immediately following a significant shock, and then scale such efforts back over time. The findings suggest that the untimely withdrawal of support could lead employees to reach a tipping point more quickly. Furthermore, employees who come through the strongest at the start of a crisis may well be at the highest risk of leaving during later stages of the recovery or post-recovery period due to resource depletion. Identifying and managing both work and non-work stressors, not only immediately following the initial shock, but throughout the post-crisis life cycle, is therefore essential.

Providing employees with the opportunity to recuperate and replenish resources is important in maintaining personal resilience. However, hiatus from regular routine and daily distraction may also provide satisfied employees with the mental space required to surface latent disquiet and reflect critically on their attachment to place, person or profession, which could lead to turnover. Managers should thus identify means of keeping employees engaged in times of post-shock hiatus. Potential strategies may include temporarily relocating employees, putting in place alternative work schedules or allowing employees to work from home (Nilakant, Walker, Rochford, & Van Heugten, 2013). Managers are also advised to maintain contact, where possible, with employees who self-impose a period of hiatus, as it is during such times that employees are most likely to engage in critical reflection and subsequent turnover deliberations. Doing so requires managers to establish trust-based relationships with their employees (Walker, Nilakant, & Baird, 2014). Where employees are required to work in isolation, managers should attempt to preserve pre-existing social structures and utilise existing social capital to support at risk employees. The findings indicate, however, that shocks have the ability to destabilise existing social structures and interpersonal relationships, leading to a deterioration of social support. Managers should thus consider existing social structures when reorganising or implementing significant change following a major shock or crisis. Dramatic changes to existing team structures or reporting relationships could have deleterious consequences.

The findings also illustrate that a commonly experienced extra-organisational shock or crisis is likely to have differential impacts on labour markets; increasing the demand for labour in some industries, while decreasing it in others. Employers should understand how labour supply is affected in their specific industry and seek to adapt retention strategies accordingly.

Finally, and more specific to the post-disaster context, managers need to recognise that in seeking to support their employees to cope with the shock experience, they themselves are at risk of compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatisation (Johal, 2015; Johal, Mounsey, Tuohy, & Johnston, 2014).

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this grounded theory study offers a rich and nuanced explanation of the turnover decision making process, it is not without its limitations. First, it is acknowledged that any grounded theory is a product of a subjective and interpretive process of coding and analysis. Although every attempt has been made in this thesis to link the research findings to the raw data, another researcher may well interpret the data differently and perhaps draw slightly different conclusions from the data. This is the nature of interpretive research and those who operate within a constructivist research paradigm accept that no analysis is neutral (Charmaz, 2014). It is further acknowledged that no study will ever be able to fully for account for, and describe, every contextual influence that might have a bearing on a particular human behaviour or social process being investigated (Johns, 2006). Scholars who have attempted such efforts in the past have ended up generating vast lists of contextual influences. For example, Johns (2006, p. 391) cites Sells' (1963) list of 236 contextual elements that could influence a situation which, he notes, pails in significance to Allport's (1937) list of 17,953 factors or traits that might exert an influence on human behaviour. This thesis therefore does not claim to account for every possible contextual influence that served to constrain or enable the decision making of participants. Equally, the four types of leaving proposed may not represent all possible forms of leaving. Future studies may seek to validate, and elaborate

upon, the proposed decision paths, or specify additional contextual influences which might shape decision making in settings outside of the post-disaster context.

Second, the findings presented in this thesis are limited to the context in which the study was conducted. The aim of the research was never to develop a grand and generalisable theory of turnover, but rather to produce a more nuanced and substantive theory that is grounded in a post-disaster context. While this limitation is acknowledged, it would be fair to argue that the findings of this study may be generalisable to similar contexts where employees are subjected to a significant and commonly experienced shock and subsequent shocks. Future research could aim to test the proposed typology in similar contexts such as that following a major industry or organisational crisis, or during periods of significant organisational change. Large scale organisational change initiatives may impact individuals in ways not dissimilar to a disaster event in terms of a significant initial shock, several subsequent shocks, and a period of prolonged uncertainty and high demand for personal resources (Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008).

Third, this thesis specifically sought to understand the decision making processes associated with leaving, and therefore did not study stayers. It is plausible that the findings demonstrating that engaging in critical reflection resulted in individuals transitioning motivational state from a staying to leaving preference may well work in opposite direction. That is, a shock may initiate a process of critical reflection that causes someone with strong preference to leave to develop a strong preference to stay. Future research could address this limitation with a comprehensive study examining at the decision processes associated with both staying and leaving. Doing so would enable one to examine the higher-level process of motivational states transitions, which may apply to both staying and leaving.

Fourth, several limitations with the way in which data was collected warrant discussion. All data was collected retrospectively via in-depth interviews. The necessity of this approach has been discussed at length in earlier chapters, however, the limitations of using self-report retrospective accounts must be acknowledged here again (Lee et al., 1996; Maertz & Campion, 2004; Steers & Mowday, 1981; Westaby, 2005). While there is no reason to

suspect that any of the participants wilfully sought to lie or withhold salient information, one cannot say for certain that participants' actual experiences mirrored those which they reported in the interviews. In addressing this limitation, future research could utilise diary-based methods for data collection to ascertain the impact of shocks prior to the actual decision to leave being implemented. Doing so would address much of the concerns regarding retrospective accounts and provide researchers with richer and data, thereby allowing for a more fine-grained understanding of the mechanisms by which shocks lead to turnover. For example, diary research would illuminate more clearly when exactly a tipping point is reached, or at what point resource deterioration leads to an impulsive decision to quit. A further limitation with the data collection stems from the fact that data was collected directly from the individual who implemented the decision to leave. The findings suggest, however, that turnover decision making is seldom an entirely individual process, but rather is undertaken collectively within a relationship or in consultation with significant others. In addressing this limitation, future researchers are encouraged to consider collecting data from all individuals involved in the decision to leave.

Last, participation in the study was voluntary and it is thus possible that participants had a common motivation for participating in the study. Indeed some participants explained that they chose to participate in the research in an attempt to make sense of their own disaster experience. In seeking to address this limitation, self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010) was built into the data collection and analysis process from the outset. Additionally, close familiarity with the research context was both a strength and limitation as it allowed for ease of rapport building with participants, but also meant that I entered the research setting with my own preconceived ideas and theories. This close affinity introduced the risk of bias, the arousal of strong emotional responses from participants, and the possibility that the research could have been distressing for the participants, as well as myself. These risks were addressed by following Corbin and Morse's (2003) protocol for conducting unstructured in-depth interviews when dealing with sensitive research topics. Researchers considering undertaking similar studies are encouraged to follow this protocol or consider the guidelines proposed by Hall et al. (2016).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While writing the final chapter of this thesis, Hom et al. (2017) published their paper titled “One Hundred Years of Employee Turnover Theory and Research” in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. I was initially apprehensive about reading the paper, worried that it might reveal major gaps in my own review of the literature, or worse yet, reveal my findings and contributions to be ‘old news’. This was, fortunately, not the case, instead their review renewed my confidence that the findings and theory presented in this thesis make an important contribution to the turnover literature. Hom et al. conclude their paper with recommendations for future research in the field. They highlight the need for turnover researchers to study distinct forms of leaving, specifically reluctant leaving. This thesis proposes four distinct types of leaving, two of which capture reluctant leaving. Hom et al. go on to encourage turnover studies that better capture context and in so doing specify the boundary conditions under which particular factors are more or less important to quit decisions. They also appeal to turnover scholars to undertake context-specific investigations of turnover. This thesis addresses both of these aspects by presenting a typology of leaving that is grounded in the specific context of a significant extra-organisational shock, and specifying four contextual factors which shape the turnover decision-making process.

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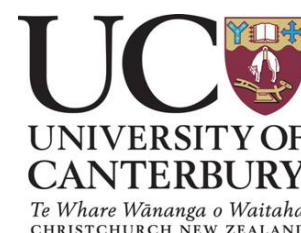
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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



After the shock: Understanding voluntary turnover decisions in a post-crisis context

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

You are invited to participate in the above mentioned research study on voluntary employee turnover following the Canterbury earthquakes. The study examines the decision-making processes of employees who left their jobs between September 2010 and September 2012. Through this research I aim to understand the impact that an organisation-wide, traumatic event has on an employee's decision to stay or leave, and how the decision to leave unfolds over time. I have selected the XXX as one of the organisations within which to locate the study, due to the fact that a number of individuals left the organisation in the period following the Canterbury earthquakes (i.e. between September 2010 and September 2012).

Organisational records show that you voluntarily left XXX during the study period, as such I would like to invite you to participate in this study. While you may have left XXX for reasons other than the Canterbury earthquakes, I would still greatly appreciate your participation in the study. Participation will involve a confidential interview with the researcher. The interview will focus on your reasons for leaving XXX, how you went about making the decision to leave and the impact that the Canterbury earthquakes had on your decision. It is anticipated that the interview will take between 30 – 60 minutes and can be conducted at a time and place that is convenient to you. If you no longer reside in Christchurch or New Zealand the interview can be conducted telephonically or via Skype/video conference. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of an interview but feel that you have valuable insights or feedback to share, then please do get in touch and we can look at alternative ways for you to have input into the study.

Your involvement in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. All information that you provide will remain strictly confidential and only my supervisors and I will have access to the raw data. Although this invitation has been sent on my behalf by the XXX Human Resource Department, the research is not being carried out on behalf of XXX. **Your personal details have not been provided to me** by the Human Resource Department and thus you are assured of the confidentiality of all data you provide. No raw data will be provided to the XXX, although the Human Resource Department will receive a summary report of the study's overall findings, where no individual participant is identified, at the conclusion of the study.

The research is being carried out as a requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of Canterbury under the supervision of Associate Professor Venkataraman Nilakant, who can be contacted at (03) 364 2987 Ext 8621 or ven.nilakant@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The study has received ethics approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Any concerns should be addressed to:

The Chair
Human Ethics Committee
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch
(human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

If you would like to participate in the study I ask that you **please contact me directly** on the following contact details:

Email: russell.wordsworth@canterbury.ac.nz
Telephone: **+64 3 364 2987 Ext 7165**
Mobile: **021 2800 575**

I look forward to your potential involvement in the research study.

Yours sincerely,

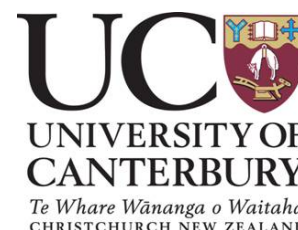
Russell Wordsworth

russell.wordsworth@canterbury.ac.nz

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

After the shock: Understanding voluntary turnover decisions in a post-crisis context



Thank you for expressing an interest in the above research study. The study aims to understand the impact that an organisation-wide, traumatic event, such as an earthquake, has on an employee's decision to stay or leave, and how the decision to leave unfolds over time. More specifically the research seeks to study the following:

- How and why people decide to stay or quit their jobs in a post-crisis context.
- What factors influence people's decisions to stay or quit?
- How people's attitudes influence their decision to stay or quit

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- Your involvement in this project will be in the form of a confidential interview with the researcher. The interview will focus on your reasons for leaving the organisation; the impact of the major earthquakes and subsequent aftershocks on your decision to leave the organisation; factors, both internal and external, that influenced the decision to leave the organisation; and the consequences of your decision to leave the organisation.
- XXX will not be informed of your participation in the study and no interview data that you provide will be passed onto your former employer.
- The interview will last between 20 – 60 minutes, depending on the depth of your responses.
- The interview will be recorded on audio tape and then transcribed into written form. Should you wish to do so, you are more than welcome to review the typed interview transcript to verify its accuracy. A transcript of the interview will be provided to you within 1 week of the interview.
- All transcription will be undertaken by the researcher or an appointed professional organisation.
- When referring to third parties during the interview (for example your old boss) you are requested not to refer to people by their names. Any names you mention during an interview will be removed during the transcription process.
- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. This includes the withdrawal of any information that you provide during the interview.

- As a follow-up to this interview, you may be asked to clarify information provided during the interview. Please note that participation in this interview does not require you to participate in such follow-up discussions.
- The overall results of the study may be published in thesis form and in academic journals or conference publications. A PhD thesis is a public document accessible via the UC Library database. The final thesis will also be added to the UC CEISMIC database.
- You may be assured of the **complete confidentiality** of all data gathered in this study. Your identity will be known only to the researcher and will not be disclosed in any ensuing publications or reports that may result from the study.
- A report summarising the overall results of the study will be provided to XXX at the conclusion of the study. This report will contain aggregate data only and will not make specific reference to any of the data you provide. The names or identifying information of participants will not be made known in this report.
- All data provided during the interview will be securely stored on the University of Canterbury campus and will only be accessible to the researcher and research supervisors. All data stored in the digital form will be stored in password protected files.
- Data collected during the study will be kept for a period of 10 years where after it will be destroyed.

Finally, I appreciate that leaving an organisation, as well as the impacts of the Canterbury earthquakes, is a sensitive topic, and in the event that participating in this study raises concerns for you, I would encourage you to utilise support from your GP or a service such the Canterbury Support Line (0800 777 846) or Lifeline (0800 543 354).

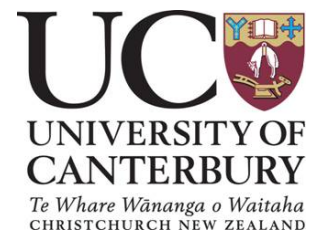
The project is being carried out as a requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of Canterbury by Mr Russell Wordsworth under the supervision of Associate Professor Venkataraman Nilakant, who can be contacted at (03) 364 2987 Ext 8621. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has received ethics approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Any complaints should be addressed to:

The Chair
Human Ethics Committee
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch
(human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)

For any future correspondence my contact details are:

Email: russell.wordsworth@canterbury.ac.nz
Telephone: **+64 3 364 2987 Ext 7165**
Mobile: **021 2800 575**



CONSENT FORM

After the shock: Understanding voluntary turnover decisions in a post-crisis context

- I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that full confidentiality will be preserved.
- I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.
- I agree to the interview being recorded via audio tape.
- I understand that the results of this study will be published in a PhD thesis which is a public document accessible via the University of Canterbury library.

I note that the project has been reviewed **and approved** by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

NAME (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I would like to review a copy of my interview transcript:

YES	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please send me a copy of the report summarising the research findings:

YES	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If 'YES', please provide your contact details or email address:
